



## **Town of Arlington Select Board**

### **Meeting Agenda**

February 13, 2023

6:30 PM

Members of the public may access the hybrid meeting via Community Center, Main Hall, 27 Maple Street, Zoom, or ACMI

### **SPECIAL SELECT BOARD MEETING**

This is a Special Select Board Meeting for the Purpose of the Community Equity Audit Public Presentation.

### **PUBLIC PRESENTATION**

1. Community Equity Audit  
Jillian Harvey, Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion  
Opportunity Consulting

Next Regularly Scheduled Meeting of Select Board February 27, 2023

You are invited to a Zoom webinar.

When: Feb 13, 2023 06:30 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Topic: Community Equity Audit Public Presentation

Register in advance for this webinar:

[https://town-arlington-ma-us.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_4SHhE8EIQ5ugYRZbp4\\_jFQ](https://town-arlington-ma-us.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_4SHhE8EIQ5ugYRZbp4_jFQ)

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.

**\*Notice to the Public on meeting privacy\*** In the interests of preventing abuse of videoconferencing technology (i.e. Zoom Bombing) all participants, including members of the public, wishing to engage via the Zoom App must register for each meeting and will notice multi-step authentication protocols. Please allow additional time to join the meeting. Further, members of the public who wish to participate without providing their name may still do so by telephone dial-in information provided above.



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## **Town of Arlington, Massachusetts**

**This is a Special Select Board Meeting for the Purpose of the Community Equity Audit Public Presentation.**



## Town of Arlington, Massachusetts

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### Community Equity Audit

#### Summary:

Jillian Harvey, Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion  
Opportunity Consulting

#### ATTACHMENTS:

	Type	File Name	Description
▢	Reference Material	Arlington_Equity_Audit_Summary.pdf	Equity Audit Summary
▢	Reference Material	Arlington_Equity_Audit_Presentation.pdf	Equity Audit Presentation
▢	Reference Material	Final_Report_Community_Equity_Audit.pdf	Final Report Community Equity Audit



## Town Of Arlington Community Equity Audit

### The Project

The Town of Arlington acknowledges that town services and programs can sometimes have unequal impact and contribute to widening or shrinking gaps between residents' opportunities and outcomes. This summer, Town Leadership decided to initiate a community equity audit to examine the town's impact on those gaps and determine how they can develop better and more equitable policies and practices in 3 areas: **Voting/Civic Participation, Housing and the Town Workforce**. Opportunity Consulting is partnering with Arlington for the scope of the project.

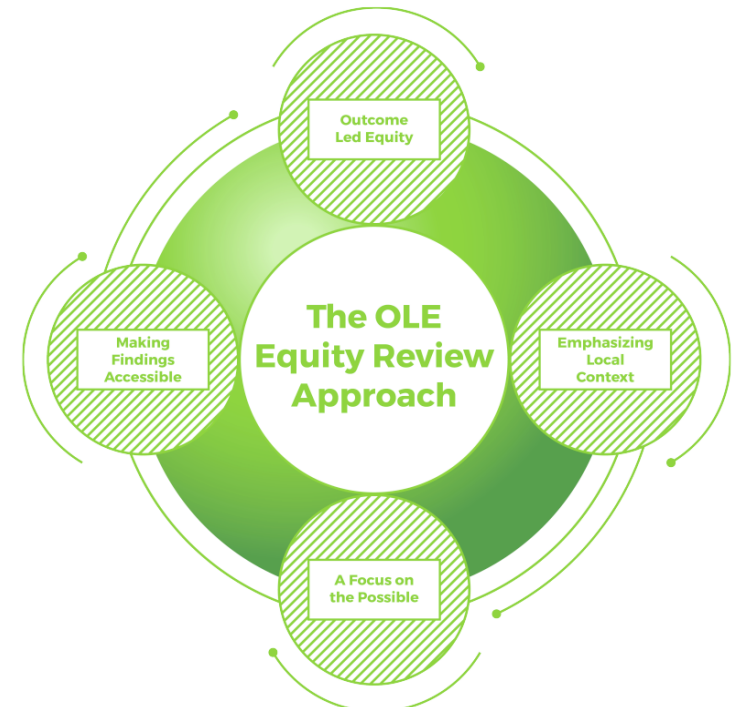
### Who We Are

Opportunity Consulting is a Washington D.C.- based, Woman and Black- owned, certified business that partners with organizations across the country. We work at the intersection of community, systems and research to create a more just and equitable world where every person has an opportunity to thrive. We are committed to the mission of helping public service organizations build initiatives, conditions and ability in order to to improve outcomes and opportunities for those who have historically been underserved.

### Our Work

We specialize in a unique, proprietary approach for equity reviews called the OLE (Outcomes Led Equity) Approach. The OLE Approach is a process that focuses on the outcomes of inequality within a local context and focusing on what's possible. Staff at Opportunity Consulting use specific data collection and analysis that leads to identifying the drivers for inequality. We work to find the areas where outcomes intersect with intentions- through town policies and structures- to identify the contributing factors of unequal outcomes for residents. We then recommend strategies for the town, in order to develop and implement systems that will create better and more equitable outcomes and opportunities for all residents.

Resident experience is a central focus and essential to this process, so we invite community members from historically underserved and underrepresented populations to participate and engage with us in the form of focus groups; to lend their voice and talk with us about their experiences in Arlington. We believe that together, we can guide The Town of Arlington to successfully implement new practices to improve diversity, equity, and inclusivity.





# Opportunity Consulting

Town of Arlington Equity Review

Yasamin Gordon

Director of Equity, Inclusion & Culture

# About Us

## Who We are

Opportunity Consulting is a Washington, DC-based, Black and Hispanic Woman-owned, certified business enterprise. We work at the intersection of community, systems, and research to create a more just and equitable world where every person has an opportunity to thrive. We partner with mission-driven organizations, school systems, cities, public agencies, and foundations to help them align equity-focused intentions with real-life impact. We offer a new approach to traditional consulting: a research-based, community-driven design process that centers on achieving racial equity in systems, policies, and practices. Our work is based on a commitment to life-long learning, staying connected to research and on-the-ground work in the field, and prioritizing lived experiences through stakeholder engagement.



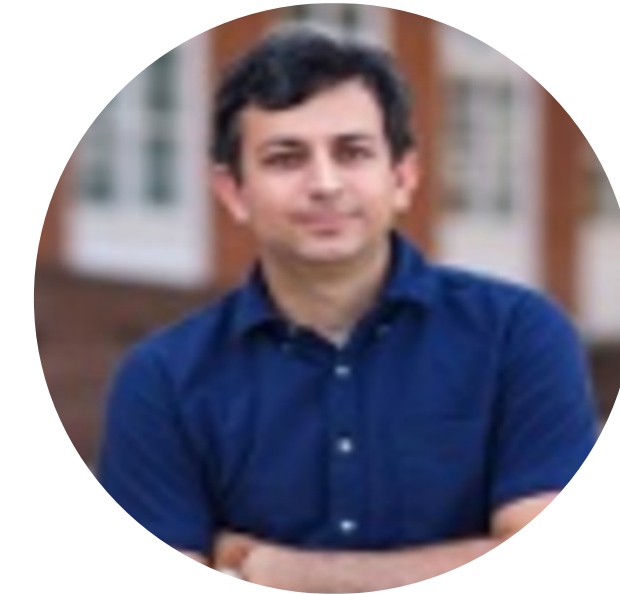
Iris Bond Gil, CEO

## Project Team



Yasamin Gordon

Project Director



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Project Manager



Felicity Anderson

Policy Analyst



Benjamin Robinson

Lead Data Analyst



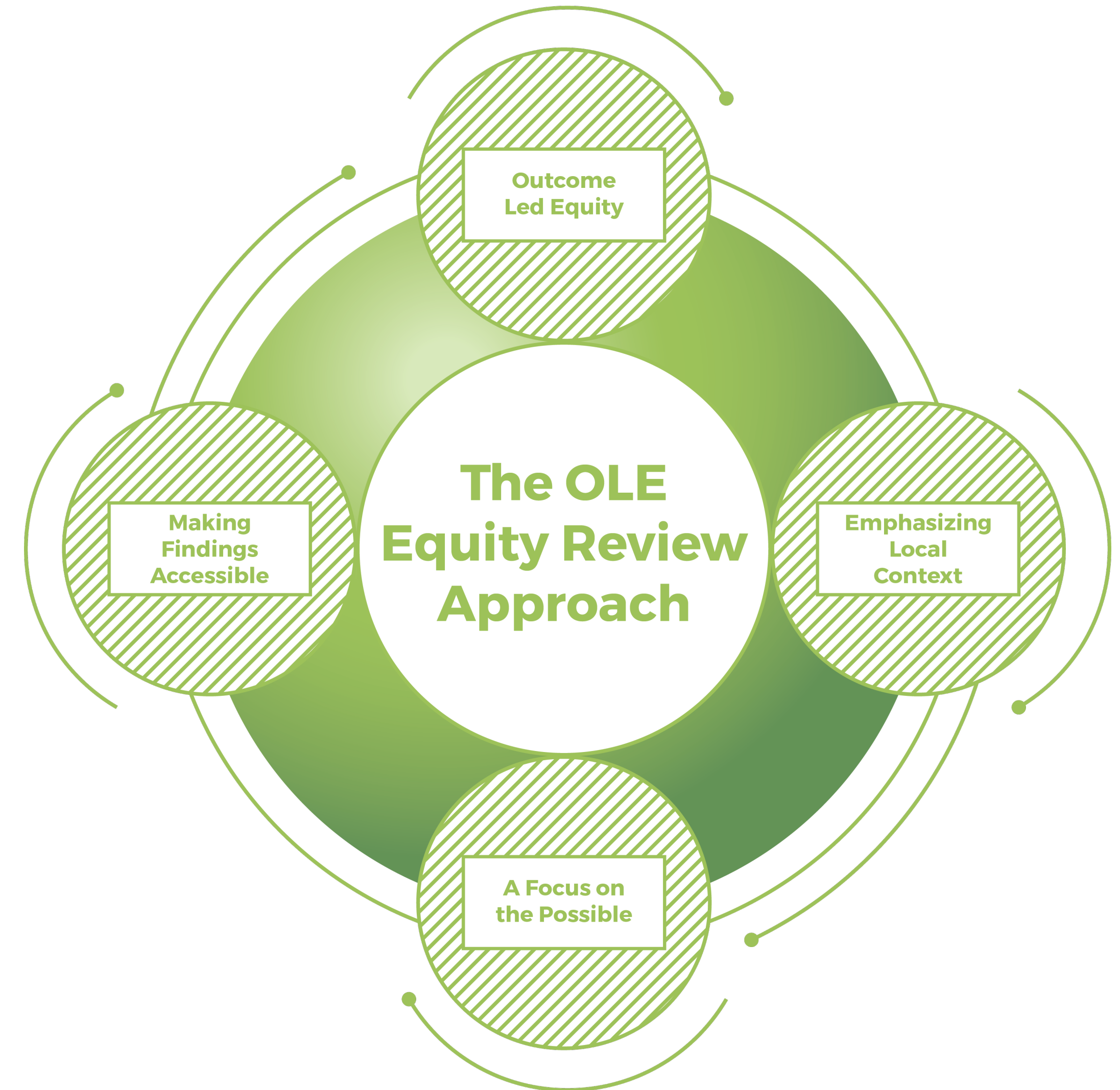
# Town of Arlington Project

## *Approach*

The OLE review begins with outcomes first. Afterward, through a process of “reverse engineering,” the OLE review explains where policies and practices are potentially contributing to unequal outcomes.

Policies represent intentions only, which are the center of this study process. So, we begin our review with a detailed examination of inequality in the outcomes (lived experience) of the city residents. Afterward, the review identifies what the outcomes look like and pinpoints which community members are most significantly negatively impacted by outcomes.

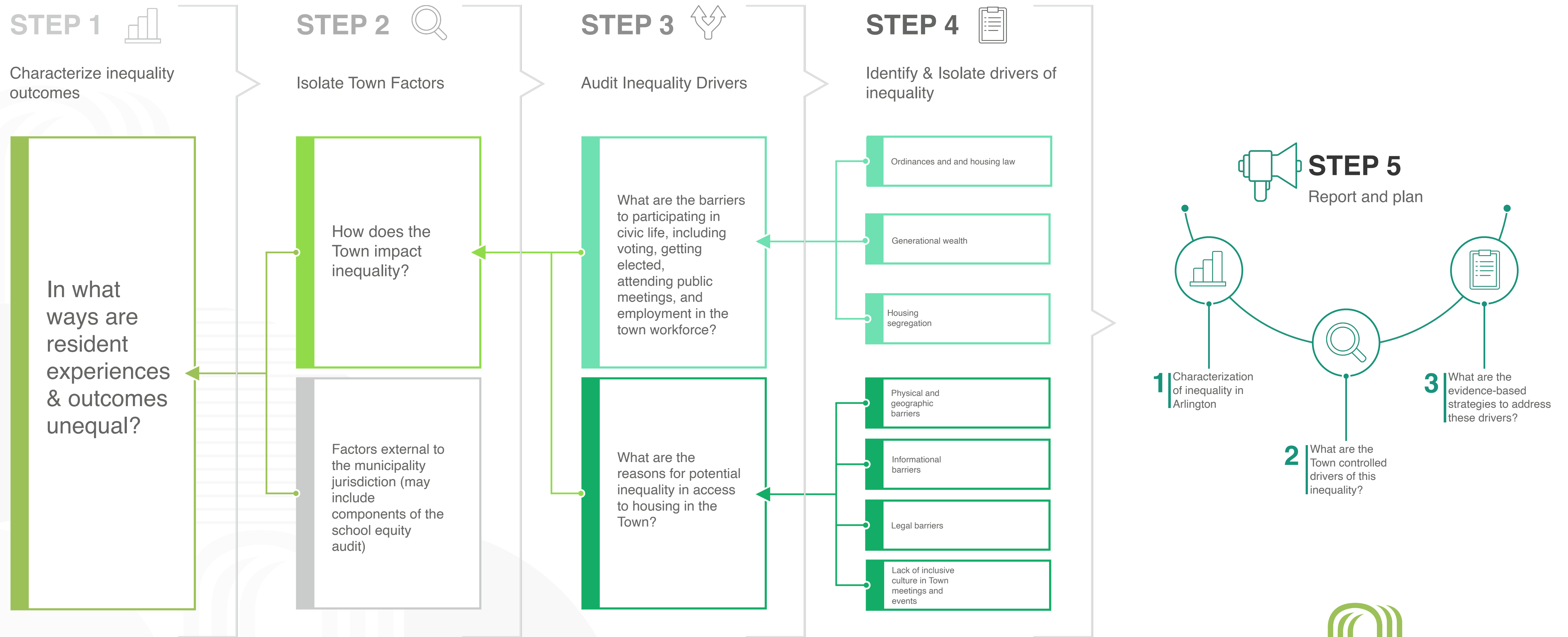
Then, through a research-based inquiry of the potential drivers of inequality in town policies, we begin to identify the actual practices that may contribute to the outcomes. Only after discovering findings and making conclusions about the specific inequalities in the town, do we examine policy documents to compare the stated intentions with the outcomes, and to identify the opportunities for improvement in city practices. The outcome-guided review allows for a laser-like focus on actual results and a real change in the residents’ experiences.



# Areas of Focus

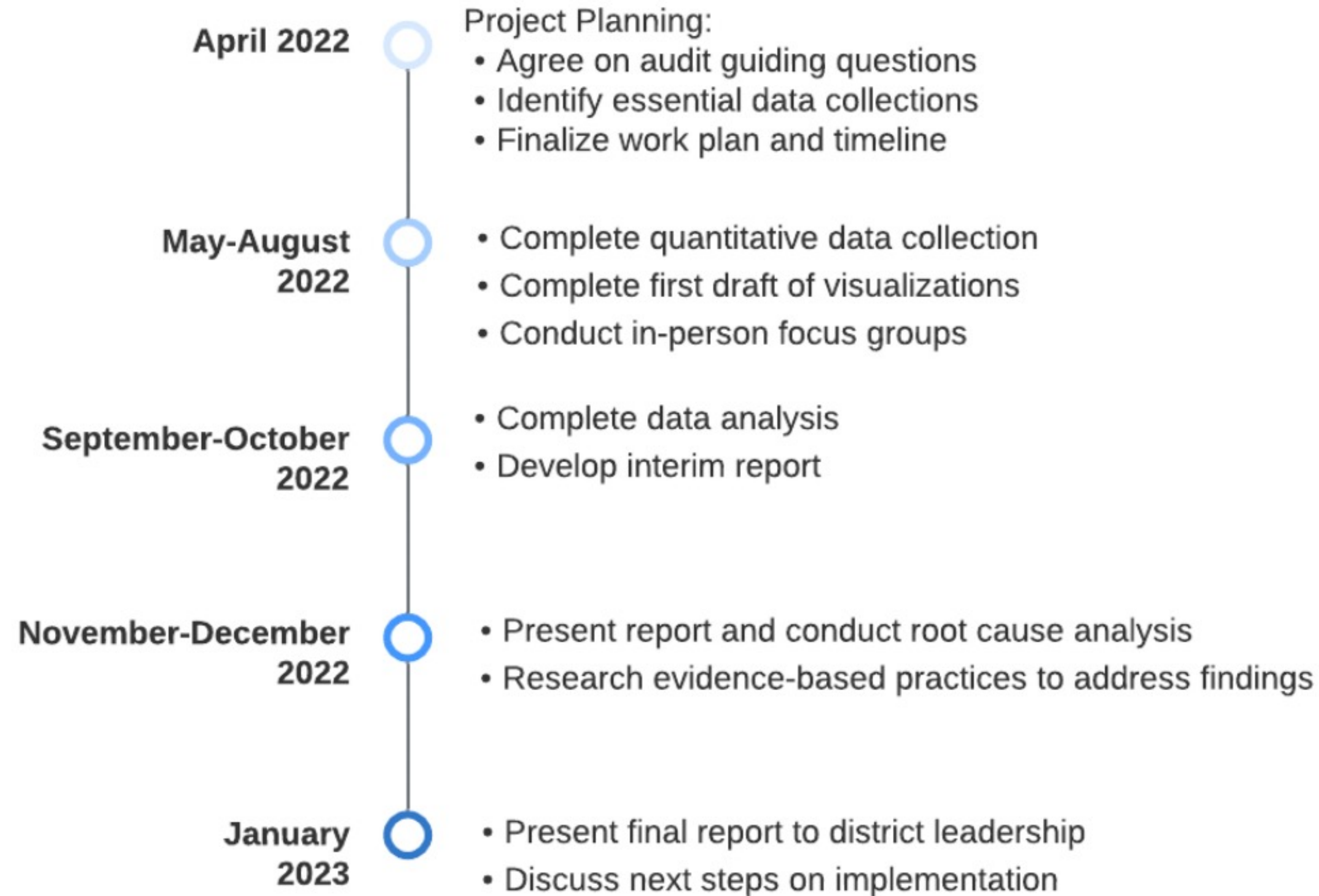
Area	Guiding Questions
<b>Civic Participation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•What are the barriers to participating in civic life, including voting, getting elected, and attending public meetings?</li></ul>
<b>Town Workforce</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•What are the barriers to employment in the town workforce and what is the impact of these barriers?</li></ul>
<b>Housing Inequality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>•What are the reasons for potential inequality in access to housing in the town?</li></ul>

# The Outcome LED Equity (OLE) Audit





# PROJECT TIMELINE



# Community Equity Audit for the Town of Arlington

Findings and Recommendations

January 31, 2023



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**Opportunity Consulting****Table of Contents**

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
Methodology	
Data Collection	6
2. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	7
3. INTRODUCTION	8
Addressing Racial and Ethnic Equity- Inclusion from the start	10
4. EQUITY AUDIT FINDINGS	11
Understanding Racial Trauma	22
Feelings of Isolation	30
5. RECOMMENDATIONS	33
6. SUGGESTED PLAN OF ACTION	50



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

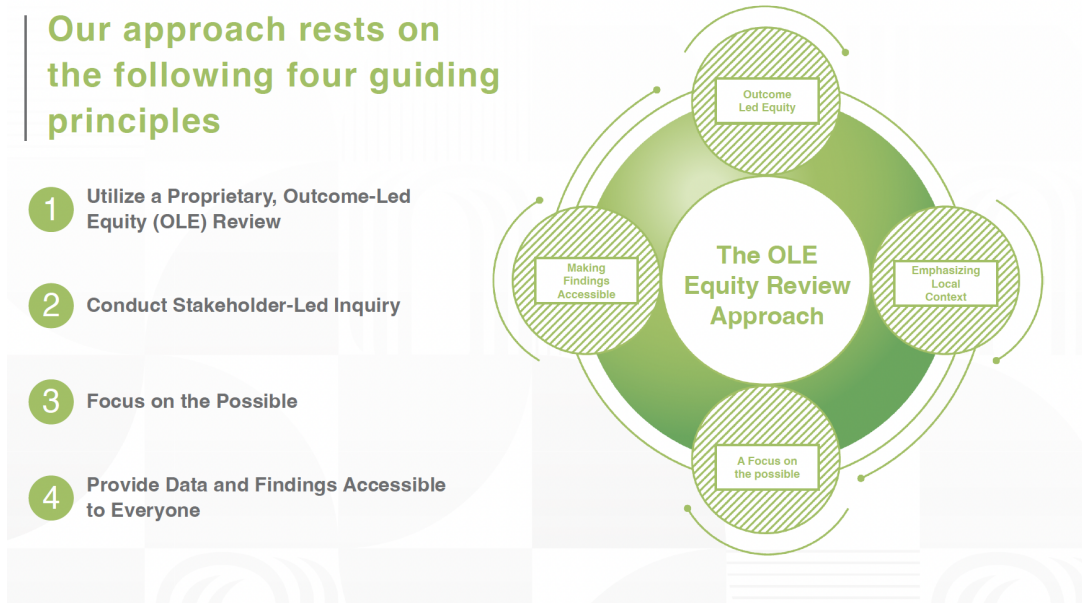
In June of 2022, the Town of Arlington contracted with Opportunity Consulting to conduct a review of the barriers to the Town's ability to connect, engage with, and respond to the needs of residents from underrepresented communities, particularly Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. The project focused on three main areas- Civic Engagement, The Town Workforce, and Housing. The Town of Arlington has acknowledged that Town services and programs can sometimes have an unequal impact and contribute to widening or shrinking gaps between residents' opportunities and outcomes. Jillian Harvey, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Director commissioned a community equity audit to examine the impact of those gaps and determine how the Town can develop better and more equitable policies and practices to increase engagement, participation, and information sharing with populations that have been historically underserved.

Opportunity Consulting partnered with Arlington for the scope of this project. The audit focused on identifying the lived experiences and perspectives of targeted groups and drawing connections between existing policies and practices utilized by the Town. We examined how identified practices contribute to Arlington's existing inequality and devised recommendations to support the Town in developing more equitable practices, in order to increase engagement and establish more meaningful connections between the Town and its residents.

### **Methodology: Utilizing the Outcome-Led Equity Approach**

We conducted this study using the Outcome-Led Equity Review Approach (Exhibit 1), in which we characterized inequality in Arlington focusing first on resident experience, then used Town data to identify the mechanisms of drivers for that inequality, and finally examined the linkages between the drivers of inequality and existing policies and practices. Using this process, we identified ten findings that contribute to inequality in the Town.

We reviewed a range of outcomes involving the existing town workforce, housing, publicly available data including the census, past community survey data, existing reports such as the

**Exhibit 1: OLE Approach**

Arlington Fair Housing Action Plan and study, press releases for Town communications, and many more. We examined how communication is distributed among various groups. We also collected qualitative data, including stakeholder input that provided a critical, local perspective of racial and social disparities in engagement outcomes. This gave our team insights into understanding outcomes in Arlington, which allowed us to focus on the drivers of inequality within the Town’s control, resulting in recommendations for real change.

**Stakeholder-Led Inquiry.** Stakeholder engagement is a critical part of our process from start to finish. Many public policy efforts fail to incorporate diverse perspectives and “miss the mark” when designing policies and programs. Other efforts may bring diverse faces to the table; however, they fail to create the conditions for the success of people from marginalized backgrounds, resulting only in diverse faces instead of diverse voices and perspectives contributing to change.

Our four guiding principles in Exhibit 2 frame our work for engaging with stakeholders to ensure that practices of inclusion are embedded throughout every project. Opportunity Consulting is committed to ensuring that the perspectives of the communities being impacted the most by systemic oppression are centered in every aspect of our work.

**Exhibit 2: Principles of Stakeholder Engagement****Trust**

We take steps early- on to establish community connections from the very beginning of the project. We recognize the populations in which we are engaging have suffered from societal trauma and oppression and may be hesitant to speak their truth and honor their efforts.

**Accessibility**

We host community-based discussions. We recognize that we are asking for the time and energy of people who have limited resources and capacity. We engage with interest and sincerity the same way we would approach someone on the street or in a cafe.

**Partnership**

At OC, we view stakeholders as partners. Participants are providing a service to us and we ensure that we provide a service to them as well. Without their input, our projects would not change outcomes.

**Relevance**

We embody respect, acknowledge what matters most for others, and center that in our work. Our content focuses on connecting the dots for participants, demonstrating how the project outcomes could impact their daily lives and target what is important.

## Data Collection

### Demographic and Administrative Data

We collected administrative data from the Town of Arlington as well as other government agencies, including the census, regional comparisons from the Arlington Fair Housing Action Plan, and publicly available data from other sources such as local and regional non-profits. The data included information on race and other social demographics, salary information of the Town workforce and elected officials, housing data patterns across the region, and characteristics such as age, tenancy, value and affordability, zoning requirements, and voter information such as active and inactive voters, and the precincts in which they hail from.

### Community Visits and Survey

Our team traveled to Arlington on multiple occasions and immersed ourselves in the community to establish connections, and gain a sense of the local context. We also developed a community survey to collect additional data from Town residents and individuals who work in Arlington but do not live there. The survey included five sections and thirty-five questions on demographics, where individuals live and work, and their perspectives on life in Arlington. We distributed the survey digitally, and it was open for responses for four weeks, resulting in 126 responses from a wide range of community members.

### Interviews and Focus Groups

We conducted 30 interviews with Arlingtonians, including residents, individuals working for community-based organizations, Town leaders, and stakeholders in the private sector. In addition, we facilitated four separate, targeted focus groups with a mix of community members from what our data revealed as the following underrepresented groups:

1. Residents who identify as Black, Indigenous, People of Color, or multicultural
2. Renters and Low Income
3. Chinese-speaking residents
4. Youth and Young Adults
5. Precincts 1 and 17
6. Parents of Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and Multicultural children

Within these targeted groups was a multitude of intersectionality among marginalized identities, including LGBTQIA+, Disability, and the Neurodivergent. We used these interviews and focus groups to collect qualitative data and deepen our understanding of marginalized groups' lived experiences and perspectives and the mechanisms through which inequality may be perpetuated.

### **Lead Stakeholder Team**

We utilized community connections formed from our initial community visits to invite a diverse group of stakeholders to guide our practice throughout the second half of the project. The role of the group was to provide insights into the data collected, provide expertise and help to plan engagements with the community. The team consisted of 8 members from diverse backgrounds who were either members of marginalized groups or involved in community organizations whose mission is to support the needs of those groups. The team convened weekly from September to December 2022, and Bi-weekly in January 2023.

### **Summary of Findings**

Our equity audit resulted in the following findings.

**Finding 1:** Arlington Town Government's civic engagement opportunities are not designed to be accessible to diverse residents, yet it is critical to achieving equity.

**Finding 2:** Town-sponsored opportunities are not available for Arlington residents to cultivate relationships, yet residents seek those opportunities in order to foster a sense of belonging.

**Finding 3:** Town officials and leaders do not have direct relationships or authentic interactions with underserved populations or communities of color. Yet, direct, meaningful connections are critical to increasing equitable policy and decision-making impact.

**Finding 4:** Marginalized residents, particularly the Black community, have diminished trust in the Town's ability to support and meet their needs and therefore have little interest in Town engagement.

**Finding 5:** Black, Indigenous, and People of Color and other marginalized populations do not see themselves as potential employees in the town workforce, yet evidence suggests that representation is a major driver for diverse recruitment.

**Finding 6:** Black, Indigenous, and People of Color have a negative perception of workplace culture and turnover rates, which limits the attractiveness of employment within the Town.

**Finding 7:** White employees are salaried at higher rates and earn more than their non-white counterparts.

**Finding 8:** The status of being a member of the civil service is a barrier to the Public Safety Departments recruiting and retaining diverse officers and staff.

**Finding 9:** The Town of Arlington is racially segregated, restricting housing options and diverse and inclusive communities.

**Finding 10:** Town-based programs are inadequate in addressing the ongoing needs of renters and marginalized residents, preventing them from getting the support and services they are entitled to.

## INTRODUCTION

Inequality in life outcomes in the United States is rising. There are inequities across the country— in every jurisdiction— within every indicator of success, including education, jobs, housing, civic participation, and more, among every marginalized social group. Research shows these gaps are not a result of natural differences in talent, ability, or aspiration but rather a result of systemic barriers<sup>1</sup>. For example, the Black-white education achievement gaps closed substantially between 1970 and 2000 before widening again and continuing to do so to this day. Additionally, it is broadly agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these gaps

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<sup>1</sup> Smeeding, Timothy M. "Public Policy, Economic Inequality, and Poverty: The United States in Comparative Perspective." *Social Science Quarterly* 86 (2005): 955–83. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42956021>.

and worsened existing inequities, and continued discrimination in public policy can further increase these gaps.

The Town of Arlington is a desirable community just outside of the City of Boston. Arlington is steeped in charming character and history and provides a highly coveted small-town New England feel. It boasts many amenities and opportunities for residents, including quick access to the city, lovely neighborhoods, schools, parks and green spaces, and many restaurants, shops, and cafes. According to the Town website, Arlington was “Once a thriving agriculture and mill town, its excellent access to metropolitan Boston has made it a very desirable place to live”.

An inclusive and welcoming community is one where residents and members feel respected, safe, and comfortable in expressing their identities. The sense of belonging that each member feels is shared equally with all other members of the group.

Residents value the history and amenities and are committed to preserving them and also ensuring the Town is a thriving and inclusive community for everyone, including a growing and changing population. Research has shown that residential diversity improves individual and collective quality of life for people of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, income, and ability levels, both in the short term and far into the future. Diverse neighborhoods are associated with stronger economic indicators, including increased job opportunities and higher levels of homeownership.<sup>2</sup>

Inclusion and belonging shape access to many fundamental opportunities, including employment, education, transportation, safety, and green spaces, and influences outcomes such as health, mental health, mortality, educational achievement, contact with the criminal justice system, and social mobility. Our society, our economy, and our democracy are better off when everyone has a chance to live, work, and learn together.

<sup>2</sup>City Observatory. “America’s Most Diverse, Mixed-Income Neighborhoods”, (2018). [https://cityobservatory.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/ADMIN\\_Report\\_18June.pdf](https://cityobservatory.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/ADMIN_Report_18June.pdf)

**Addressing Racial and Ethnic Equity- Inclusion from the start**

As an outcome, equity is achieved when race, ethnicity, and social status no longer predict one's income, wealth, zip code, or life outcome. Additionally, most people are motivated to participate and lead through a sense of collective and cultural identity. Local residents who feel they don't belong to a place or region are less likely to invest time and energy into improving their surroundings. A sense of agency, or the ability to influence your community, is essential for engagement and leadership. It is unlikely that people will be motivated to engage in community transformation initiatives or sustain the long-term efforts needed if they do not feel that their efforts and opinions matter - which is partly dependent on feelings of belonging and trust. As a process, we engage those who are most impacted by systemic inequity in developing and advancing the solutions that impact their lives. Designing strategies that support the most marginalized among us results in outcomes that benefit all of us.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout our American history, racist and discriminatory policies have been woven into the fabric of society, harming Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color. It is the result of these policies that all marginalized communities exist, and have been systematically denied opportunities in jobs, education, housing, and the ability to thrive. The purpose of addressing The United States of America's legacy of racism and systemic discrimination is to ensure equal access and opportunity for all. Racial equity aims to improve all groups' lives, and the strategies are targeted to specific groups based on their collective needs. The failure of systems to support communities of color directly impacts all of us, and our collective success will increase with targeted universalism.

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<sup>3</sup> Snow ME, Tweedie K, Pederson A. Heard and valued: the development of a model to meaningfully engage marginalized populations in health services planning. BMC Health Serv Res. 2018 Mar 15;18(1):181. doi: 10.1186/s12913-018-2969-1. PMID: 29544486; PMCID: PMC5856315.



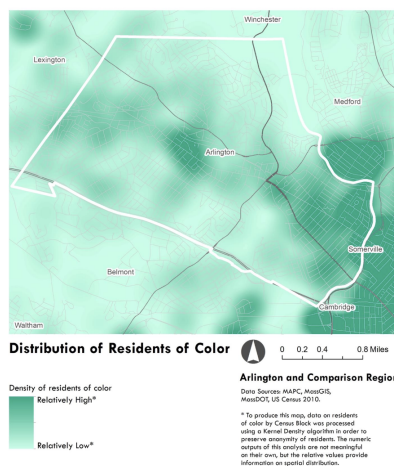
## EQUITY AUDIT FINDINGS

**Finding 1** Arlington Town Government's civic engagement opportunities are not designed to be accessible to diverse residents, yet it is critical to achieving equity.

- Systemic barriers within Town Government, such as appointment to commissions, seat vacancy awareness, and eligibility for candidacy, limit diversification.
- Arlington residents value the right to vote, but informational barriers like English-only materials in outreach for voting and elections create obstacles for historically underrepresented and non-English-speaking groups.
- Physical barriers to accessibility include but are not limited to- ADA accessibility at polling locations, language challenges for non-English speakers, and unclear information about candidates, precincts, and the voting process.

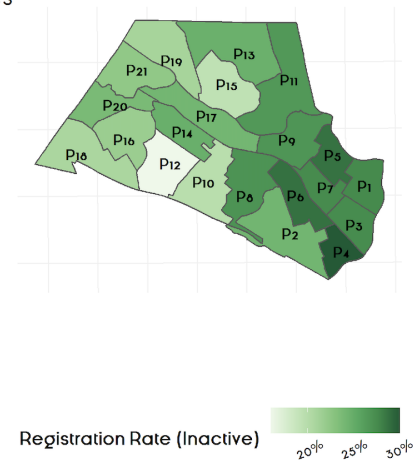
Through the course of our stakeholder engagement process, we found evidence of a

**Exhibit 3: Distribution of residents of color**



**Exhibit 4: Arlington Inactive Voter Rates**

Map of Rates

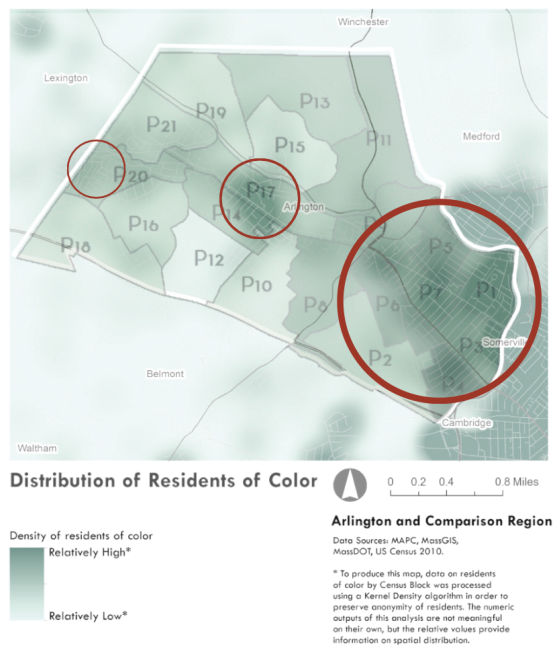


widespread belief that the Arlington Town Government is not responsive to the needs faced by its residents- particularly in Black, Indigenous, People of Color, low-income, and differently-abled communities. Evidence from Exhibit 3 shows the Arlington population density by race, which illuminates areas where Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, as well as

low-income households, are most prevalent. Comparatively, Exhibit 4 shows the location of rates of inactive voters, the areas with higher rates are a darker green.

When we overlay the two maps together (Exhibit 5), it becomes clear that residents in areas where there is a higher prevalence of Black, Indigenous, People of Color, and low-income residents have higher inactive voters. This suggests that these groups face barriers to voting that differ from their white, upper-middle-class neighbors.

### Exhibit 5: Overlay of Inactive Voters



The perspective of the majority of residents we spoke with is that the Town has yet to implement targeted measures to make voting and civic engagement generally more accessible and attractive to marginalized groups. Our process revealed that residents from those groups—particularly non-English speaking or speaking English as a second language—do not have a basic understanding of the structure of Arlington’s Town Government, the election process, or the Town committee and commission structure. Additionally, we found that the gap in understanding can be directly tied to a missing component of education and information barriers and has resulted in a

generalized mistrust in the Town's commitment to serving the best interests of people within those groups.

Many residents spoke about not knowing where to get information about candidates and confusion around polling places and what precincts they are eligible to vote in. At the national level, in general, communities of color tend to receive lower outreach efforts by candidates because of their smaller turnout rate, even though candidates often have a budget for outreach<sup>4</sup>. However, when considering outreach planning, candidates often target communities

<sup>4</sup> Melissa R. Michelson and Lisa García Bedolla, *Mobilizing Inclusion: Redefining Citizenship through Get-Out-the-Vote Campaigns* (Yale University Press, 2012)

with a higher likelihood of voting and strong civic engagement among its members. If they are not likely voters, it stands to reason that candidates are less likely to spend outreach efforts on those groups. This was also aligned with residents' comments and lived experiences in the Town of Arlington. This means that the Town should address that gap by providing resources for voters to get information about prospective candidates. Many towns have implemented strategies to address this, including mailers with resources that are sent to each residential mailbox, hosting candidate forums, and more.

Our focus groups revealed that many residents have never been visited by or witnessed canvassing by candidates in their neighborhoods in East Arlington or among those who live in the Arlington Housing Authority locations, which are the more diverse areas of town where there are higher rates of diverse populations. During our focus group for Chinese-speaking immigrant community members, all of the participants agreed that they had never been approached or received information directly from a candidate for office or from the Town, even though many participants are eligible to, and have voted in elections. Some explained that in the past, they had received information from the staff at the Arlington Housing Authority.

One focus group participant who resides in East Arlington told a story about an entire neighborhood feeling excitement about a Town Meeting candidate who identified as Black, canvassing and making "good connections" on their block and others. When election day arrived, they and some of their friends went specifically to vote for that candidate only to find that the candidate's name was not on the ballot. They

later discovered the candidate had not known they were canvassing in a neighborhood outside their jurisdiction. That candidate subsequently lost the election. The East Arlington resident voter expressed frustration and signaled a mass confusion that took place among their neighbors over where to vote and who their local representatives were. That situation was left unresolved.

"I vote but I don't know who the candidates are or what they support. I just go in, check the boxes and leave because I want to exercise my right."

~ Focus group participant.

A third story was from a resident who is physically disabled, being unable to access their polling place on election day because it was not ADA accessible. This resulted in that resident being unable to cast their vote due to their physical limitations, not having known that their polling place was inaccessible.

These stories speak to both direct and indirect disenfranchisement of Arlington voters. The common gaps in understanding and access and mistrust among residents can be directly related to the absence of an official, universal system for language accessibility, voting and elections procedures, and Arlington's reliance on more traditional systems for information sharing, especially surrounding elections and the decision-making process, including "word of mouth" and a reliance on digital platforms. Town staff spoke about unofficial systems during the employee focus group as well, where there was a general consensus that these informal systems are typically more widely known by upper-middle-class white residents who have personal connections to the Town and therefore are more likely to know about and avail of opportunities to engage civically or apply for jobs. Our interviews also provided a similar perspective among BIPOC or lower-income individuals, who spoke to a reputation of nepotism among the Town Government, the Police Department, and Town leadership.

**Finding 2** Town-sponsored opportunities are not widely available for Arlington residents to cultivate relationships, yet residents seek those opportunities in order to foster a sense of belonging.

- a. Diverse residents are unaware of opportunities for connection and building community.
- b. Diverse residents are not invited to engage in designing or planning for events.

Interviews and focus groups within Arlington demonstrated that without explicit efforts to create and facilitate opportunities for residents to build cross-cultural connections, what results is a sense of exclusion and isolation. Collective regard among residents we spoke with, particularly newcomers to the Town, expressed a desire for the Town to facilitate connecting with others throughout the entire community. Residents spoke of their willingness to join opportunities and spoke highly of the few opportunities they have attended in the past. Residents from the

Mandarin-speaking community collectively spoke about enjoying the opportunities where they live at the Arlington Housing Authority and also wanting the ability to explore other areas of the Town and have others engage with their community at that location.

A couple of residents who were recent newcomers, ended up joining a focus group not because they knew and understood the project at hand, but because they were seeking community connection. They both expressed that they have found difficulty finding information about where they can go to simply connect with other Arlington residents. One newcomer expressed that they have found it especially difficult as a young, single professional and that they felt excluded because they did not have any children.

*"We heard about this focus group and just wanted to come to meet people, get connected. We don't know anybody here yet".*

*~ Focus Group Participant*

Arlington has made efforts to bring residents together in community spaces. Town-sponsored events like Town Day were widely acclaimed by all groups. The recent additions of events

through the Black Joy Project, cultivated by the Town DEI Division and the Commission for Arts and Culture, have been well attended; although some newcomers had not received information about the events, as they were also not connected on social media.

*The only thing I found was story time at the library- I do not have any children, so that does not appeal to me or anyone like me".*

*~Focus Group Participant*

These are positive actions that Town has taken; however, there was also a collective regard among groups that Arlington does not provide sufficient opportunities for **cross-cultural** connection and exploration. Language swaps (opportunities for different language-speaking

groups to provide basic education to others to spread knowledge of their language and culture across groups) and community dinners were brought up multiple times in various groups to bridge gaps between multicultural resident groups and the white community.

Most people are motivated to participate and lead by their collective and cultural identities. If local residents do not feel like they belong or are accepted in a place or region, they are less likely to invest time and effort in improving it<sup>5</sup>. The ability to influence one's community is an essential aspect of the engagement process. Residents are unlikely to participate in community programs and initiatives, or sustain long-term efforts if they do not feel that their opinions are important, which is partly dependent on their feelings of belonging and trust. Arlington should develop systems that encourage and facilitate community connections among groups in order to begin to foster a sense of belonging among underrepresented groups.

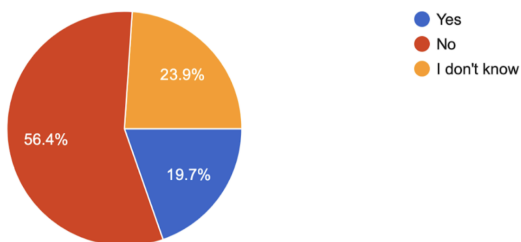
**Finding 3** Town officials and leaders do not have direct relationships or authentic interactions with underserved populations or communities of color, yet direct, meaningful connections are critical to increasing impact in equitable policy and decision-making.

- a. The Town's approach to connecting with communities and gathering information about their needs is not systematized.
- b. Communication policies and procedures create barriers to building Community trust.
- c. Community needs are not measured or addressed in a systematic way.

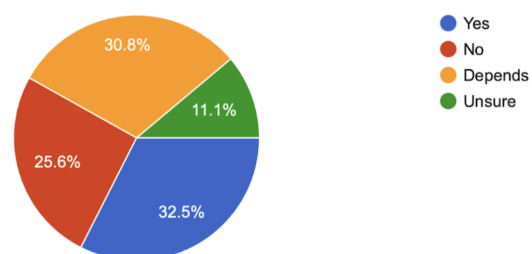
Exhibit 6 shows the results of our community survey when we asked whether or not residents felt the Town government cares about and prioritizes their needs.

### Exhibit 6: Community Survey Results

**Do you feel like the town makes an effort to help you with your challenges?**



**Do you believe that town leadership cares about you and your community?**



<sup>5</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Creating an Inclusive Society: Practical Strategies to Promote Social Integration" (2009). <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/egms/docs/2009/Ghana/inclusive-society.pdf>

*"I see most efforts in town to recognize Indigenous people as colonizers patting colonizers on the back, with little to no actual Indigenous leadership". ~ Survey Respondent*

Our interviews and focus groups revealed similar results. The comments from residents among underrepresented populations reflected a belief that because there is limited diverse representation among elected officials and commissions, the priorities set forth by the Town do not reflect the needs of the most marginalized groups. In fact, many residents also spoke about this in the comments of the community survey.

Further evidence from stakeholder engagement suggests that most residents from under-represented groups feel that elected leaders are disconnected from their lived experiences and are not developing policies that sufficiently address the challenges people face in their daily lives. When asked, the majority of participants expressed that they have rarely been asked about their individual challenges.

Some mentioned the annual community survey that is disseminated each year, and participants expressed mixed feelings regarding it. Some expressed that the survey had not asked the right questions, and many participants expressed frustration that the Town only provides a single opportunity for input from the community. Feelings of belonging and trust are important factors in motivating people to participate in community transformation initiatives and sustain long-term efforts. Effective leaders must be able to influence their community and address needs that are constantly emerging and changing. There was a collective regard among all participants, that more opportunities for input are needed.

Specific input from members of the community who are Neurodivergent or otherwise differently abled, or who are parents of children from those groups expressed their experiences with various barriers in obtaining information and communication from the Town and barriers in Town infrastructure, as well as within the school system. Participants described limited options for alternative activities, communication, support, and challenges for their children in public



spaces and described that even though there is an active Disability Commission, they have yet to experience a policy being introduced in the Town that seeks to address those challenges.

Among the 61 million individuals with disabilities in the country, one-fifth are people of color<sup>6</sup>. According to a National Disability Institute report, they are among the most marginalized in The United States, often living below the bottom rung of the economic ladder. Having a disability as a person of color increases the chances of discrimination and hurdles already faced in housing, employment, and healthcare, more than for whites. However, in discussions of the most notable socio-political issues, race and disability continue to be treated as separate, often biologically based categories justifying separate treatment. In government work, people are too often regarded as numbers on a grid, placed in categories and boxes that are dehumanizing. Intersectionality is not a box to be checked, but a way of life. If the Town of Arlington and its government are seeking to serve people better and prioritize equity, disability justice should be included in any framework that is brought to every policy discussion.

*"Public infrastructure and services are not wholly designed to support children with disabilities... other towns have programs at the public library, sensory-friendly sports programs, and the like. That might be different if someone with Neurodivergence was a decision maker".*

*~ Survey Respondent*

<sup>6</sup> N. Goodman, M. Morris, K. Boston, "FINANCIAL INEQUALITY: Disability, Race, and Poverty in America." (2019). <https://www.nationaldisabilityinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/disability-race-poverty-in-america.pdf>



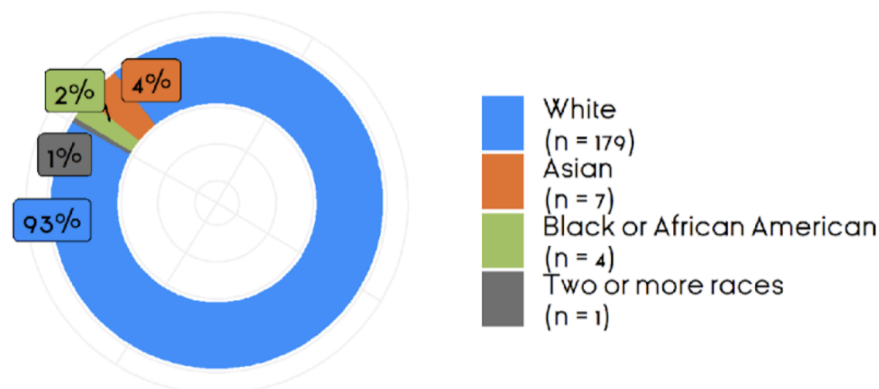
**Finding 4** Marginalized residents, particularly the Black community, have a diminished level of trust in the Town's ability to support and meet their needs and therefore have little interest in Town engagement.

- a. Town leaders are predominantly white and the workforce does not reflect the diversity within the community, which limits residents' ability to make cultural connections.
- b. Incidents of racial bias have been widely publicized, and not adequately addressed in order to regain trust among the communities that were harmed. Targeted, community-focused restorative practices, including racial reconciliation, are among the most successful strategies for restoring trust.

Arlington has implemented strategies to address racial and social inequality, as one of the first Towns in the area to establish a commission to support the needs of marginalized communities, with the Human Rights and Disability Commissions having been established around 30 years ago. In more recent years, the Town has also furthered steps to address racial and social inequality by establishing the LGBTQIA+Rainbow Commission and hiring for DEI Director and Community Outreach positions. In the summer of 2022, the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Department for the Town conducted a demographics survey at our request. The result below shows that little progress toward diversification has been made. Exhibit 7 presents an overview of the current demographics of Arlington's elected and appointed officials- including elected officials, Town Meeting Members and Town commissions, who responded to the survey.

**Exhibit 7: Public Service: Comparison of Representation**

Race



The steps the Town has taken to begin to address inequality are commendable. However, our stakeholder engagement process also revealed a significant distrust among the Black and Brown community. During this audit, many residents from the Black and Brown community requested specifically to participate in 1:1 conversations rather than attend public focus groups. Many spoke to discomfort speaking publicly about their mistrust in the Town Government, which they described as resulting from a belief that nepotism, financial power, and social privilege dominated the positions of most elected officials. When asked about their interest in running for office or participating in a commission, the answer from participants was a resounding no. When asked to elaborate, many said that because the Town is mostly made up of individuals with whom they could not personally connect or identify, they had little faith that their presence in the Town government would not be tokenized.

"They think that just because we're Black, our views should be the same as theirs. But Black Republicans have the right to exist and have their voices heard just as much as Black Democrats. We all experience the same racism."

~ Interview Participant

Many participants spoke to a belief within the Town that "all Black and Brown people are the same", and that notion is harmful. Many participants provided examples of a local volunteer group that they felt has a reputation for "placing pressure" on Black and Brown residents who are inexperienced in local government to run for office or commission appointment, simply to "increase diversity" in Town Government, and that neither the volunteer group nor the Town has taken steps to foster a belief that

any successful candidate would not experience harm in the Town Government setting. In fact, the failure to do so has created distrust in both the Town Government and the volunteer group alike. Some individuals described rumors that have affected their perception of the groups' motives. While the group has been successful in securing candidates from marginalized backgrounds to run for office, many participants described the group as being run by upper-middle-class white individuals, who are seeking to "do good" and support the diversification of Town Government but are doing so in ways that are actually creating barriers to progress and tokenizing the Black and Brown community for their own political gain. For

instance, a couple of participants expressed frustration with the Town's reliance on receiving information from members from that particular group, which they deemed "inaccurate", and placing members from that group in positions of power, which is what has prevented them from considering participation on commissions or running for Select Board. This is a classic example of how virtue signaling- an act that implicitly claims that the speaker has made a determination about an important moral question and wants to signal others to align with their specific values, can actually be harmful and create barriers for communities of color. This is also an example of how the notion that the entire Black and Brown community has the same political views and opinions can contribute to collective harm.

“When liberal whites fail to understand how they can and/or do embody white supremacist values and beliefs even though they may not embrace racism as prejudice or domination (especially domination that involves coercive control), they cannot recognize the ways their actions support and affirm the very structure of racist domination and oppression that they wish to see eradicated.”  
~ bell hooks.

Additionally, the collective regard from this demographic group, in particular, expressed that community-facing harm has not been adequately addressed by the Town. Many participants spoke of a desire for more direct transparency in the communication from the Town about racially motivated crimes and incidents, as well as for the Town to address incidents and proactive initiatives with the Black and Brown community *directly*. Previously, we described how feelings of belonging can have an impact on how residents interact with their local government. Residents from the Black and Brown community in Arlington expressed frustration at past and recent events where there is a common belief that the Town withheld information, and instead of seeking to repair residual harm done to the community at large, only focused those efforts on repair on those who were directly involved in the incidents.

## Understanding Racial Trauma

Traumatic racial events (or racial traumatic stress) are the mental and physical impacts of experiencing racism, ethnic discrimination, and racial bias. The consequences of racial trauma are long-lasting, especially when it is compounded by intersectionality within systems of oppression. It can manifest in harmful ways, and when this occurs, psychological safety becomes paramount. In these circumstances, residents will often look to institutions for support, aid, and resources. The negative experiences among under-represented racial groups are ongoing and racial trauma affects and changes the way an individual navigates the world. We found evidence that Arlington has room for improvement when it comes to the consideration of these circumstances in the Town's responses to racially motivated acts.

The American Psychological Association defines trauma as;

*“Any disturbing experience that results in significant fear, helplessness, dissociation, confusion, or other disruptive feelings intense enough to have a long-lasting negative effect on a person’s attitudes, behavior, and other aspects of functioning”.*

They further explain, *“Traumatic events include those caused by human behavior (e.g., hate crimes, war, industrial accidents, etc.) as well as by nature (e.g., earthquakes) and often challenge an individual’s view of the world as a just, safe, and predictable place”.*<sup>7</sup>

Research has demonstrated that ongoing trauma affects biological functions such as dysregulation of brain circuits and interference with the immune system, which can cause physiological consequences and leave victims of trauma more susceptible to chronic illness.<sup>8</sup> Long-term and transgenerational effects are apparent as well, which often manifest in decreased emotional regulation, fear of trusting others, learning challenges, and feelings of alienation. All of these factors should be considered when addressing the needs of communities who are facing ongoing trauma due to racism, racial oppression, and

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<sup>7</sup> American Psychological Association (2022), <https://dictionary.apa.org/trauma>

<sup>8</sup> De Bellis MD, Zisk A. The biological effects of childhood trauma. *Child Adolesc Psychiatr Clin N Am*. 2014 Apr;23(2):185-222, vii. doi: 10.1016/j.chc.2014.01.002. Epub 2014 Feb 16. PMID: 24656576; PMCID: PMC3968319.

discrimination, and speaks to the importance of transparency and community healing practices within the organizational response to racially motivated incidents. Because of the unique set of circumstances related to racial trauma in communities of color, direct communication and support are needed in any attempt to repair harm.

*"I'd never consider working for the Town. The only person I've ever known who worked there wasn't paid well, worked crazy hours, and ended up leaving".*

*~ Interview Participant Identified as BIPOC identified as BIPOC*

**Finding 5** Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, and other marginalized populations do not see themselves as potential employees in the Town workforce, yet evidence suggests that representation is a major driver for diverse recruitment.

- a. Current recruitment efforts fall short of addressing and attracting communities of color, including immigrant populations.
- b. Direct partnerships for pipelines for recruitment are missing.
- c. Current recruitment and job postings are limited in sharing information about perks and benefits.
- d. Training on cultural responsiveness and language accessibility has not been universal, yet Staff are motivated by the opportunity in order to better serve residents from marginalized communities.

When asked about the potential to apply for open positions with the Town workforce, many participants spoke of not knowing about opportunities or understanding the benefits of working for a municipality. Others expressed the convenience of being able to commute to the City of Boston for work that pays at high rates and provides good benefits.

We found that the attractiveness of working for the Town of Arlington has much to be desired. When we asked survey participants whether or not they work in the town, to which 67.5% answered "no", and if they have ever considered working for the Town, to which 73% of respondents also answered "no". Participants provided multiple comments that elaborated on

their feelings about working for the Town of Arlington, which we aggregated into the following themes:

- The perception that working for the Town would mean lower paying wages and fewer perks than in the private sector.
- The perception that the work environment would be toxic for marginalized groups due to the lack of diversity.
- The perception that existing skillsets are not transferable to municipal employment.
- Bureaucracy and systems barriers would create additional workplace challenges.

"Software development is my field of expertise and I'm not aware that the Town employs any software developers".

~ Survey Respondent

The Town's current recruitment strategies illustrate that there is a need for a more explicit, equity-focused lens in the practice. From our conversations with employees and leaders, we found the Town mostly advertises open positions through the Town website and online job advertising platforms, and recruitment partnerships with local community organizations

and nearby higher education intuitions do not currently exist. The collective regard from these conversations was that posting on web-based platforms only can contribute to the underemployment of residents from marginalized groups, especially in new and emerging populations. One Town employee remarked that many of the jobs advertised in the previous methods listed might often be missed by potential applicants due to the unofficial "word of mouth" system that tends to produce applicants. Another factor that was revealed in our conversations with Town staff, is that specific perks and benefits that may come with certain positions are not explicitly stated or mentioned in the advertisements for open positions. This could be directly tied to the theme that emerged from residents in relation to the perception that Town employment is less desirable than the private sector.

Staff elaborated further and stated that those who are connected to the Town tend to find out about open positions more easily because they "hear through the grapevine" that positions are

available, and encourage their friends and family to apply. Another Town employee expressed that they themselves found the job posting for their current position online, but expressed that they are in a social category that provided them with the knowledge, privilege, and skill to do so.

**Findings****6 and 7**

- Black, Indigenous, and People of Color have a negative perception of workplace culture and turnover rates, which limits the attractiveness of employment within the Town.
- White employees are salaried at higher rates and earn more than their non-white counterparts.

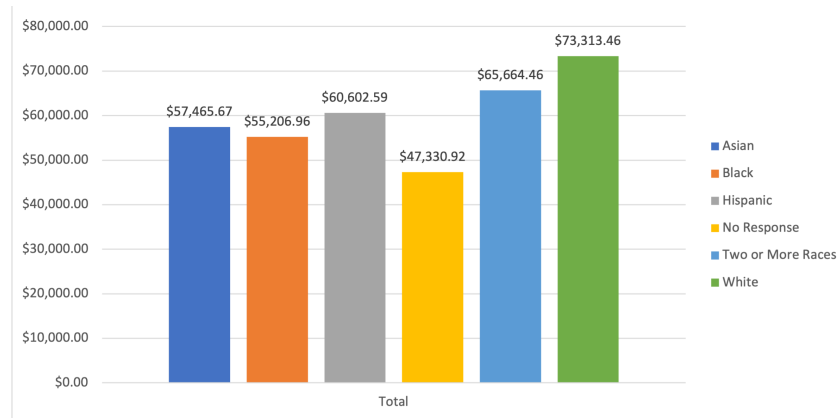
**a.** BIPOC employees are mostly in working-class positions that are typically hourly, lower-paying, and structured in shift work.

**b.** BIPOC employees are more likely to face harsher workplace conditions versus employees who are white, due to the potential for racial aggressions that create a hostile work environment, and systemic racism that contributes to fewer opportunities for pipelines into leadership and higher paying positions.

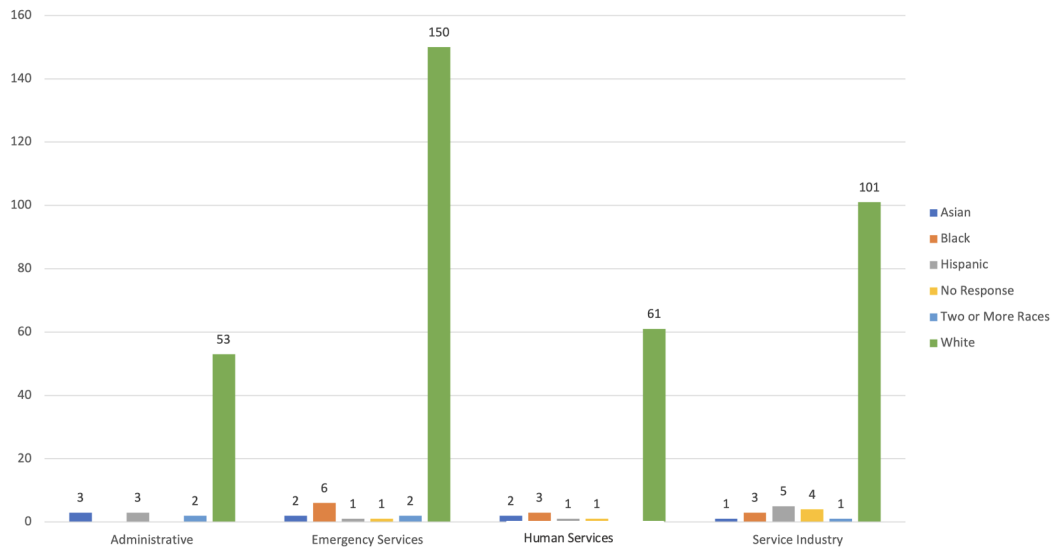
**c.** Town leaders and staff have not received ongoing professional development in order to gain the skills to work with diverse communities.

The Town of Arlington's workforce is overwhelmingly white. We discussed the diversity of the Town's workforce through interviews and discussions with Town leadership and focus groups with residents. In general, everyone we spoke with agreed the lack of diversity within the Town's workforce is an issue that should be actively addressed. The Town provided us with current data for the Town workforce for salary and wages, racial and gender demographics. They provided us with info for every job title in the Town. From this information, we were able to combine the data into overall job categories and determine which categories contained the highest-paid wages, and what the racial demographics of those categories were. Exhibits 8 and 9 provide the results.

**Exhibit 8**  
Average wages by race



**Exhibit 9**  
Job categories by race



- **Service Industry** (facilities, public works, custodial, roads and maintenance workers, inspections)
- **Emergency services** (Police, Fire and associated jobs)
- **Human Services** (DEI, social work [youth supports, veterans affairs, etc], Recreation, Library)
- **Administrative** (clerk, planning and development, zoning, IT, HR, Town Manager)



The issue of pay is especially impactful. Exhibit 8 shows employees from non-white races earn less on average than their white counterparts, with the largest disparity existing between Black employees and any other identified race category, respectively. Though these disparities may be due to a complex host of factors, we can identify some of the challenges facing these groups. First, some potential applicants we spoke to expressed concern about the lack of transparency in public salaries, which prevents them from comparing their salaries to peers of comparable tenure. This hinders the ability of applicants to negotiate their pay. Second, Exhibit 9 shows that Black, Indigenous, and People Of Color employees mostly hold working-class positions that are typically hourly, lower-paying, and structured in shift work. All factors can be directly linked to the challenges in the attractiveness of Town employment.

**Finding 8** Civil service membership is a barrier to the Public Safety Departments recruiting and retaining diverse officers, responders and staff.

The Town Workforce, including the Public Safety departments, has shown some growth in diversification. The Arlington Police Department has successfully hired both female-identifying officers, and officers of color- however, not at the same diversity growth rate as the Town. In both Public Safety departments, current staff demographics remain overwhelmingly white and male-identifying. These factors suggest that a barrier lies within recruitment. Currently, Public Safety is operating as a member of the civil service, which requires the departments to prioritize hiring Arlington residents, especially as police officers and firefighters. This requirement presents a significant barrier to the Departments achieving their goals of diversification, as recent census data shows that the Town of Arlington is disproportionately white in comparison to surrounding regions.

- The share of foreign-born residents is moderately higher in the comparison region than Arlington, 26% vs. 19%.
- 2020 census data show there were 5.78 times more White (Non-Hispanic) residents (33.9k people) in Arlington, MA than any other race or ethnicity.
- 5.87k were Asian (Non-Hispanic) and 1.81k were two or more races (Non-Hispanic).
- Hispanics made up just 5.16% of the population.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> United States Census Bureau, 2020. <https://data.census.gov/all?q=arlington,+Ma>.

An effective Public Safety Department is one whose community trusts it. The challenge in law enforcement and fire safety in particular is to earn trust because staff often appear in residents' lives when something goes wrong, and when residents are the most vulnerable. Residents are more likely to trust Public Safety officers in those situations if they feel that the staff has a complete understanding and respect for their culture and identity. Research has shown that law enforcement and fire agencies that have a wide range of diversity can be more relatable to residents with a shared identity, and more responsive to community needs<sup>10</sup>. Diversification is often cited as one of the catalysts for reform, allowing officers and law enforcement leaders to reflect and introspectively address departmental issues. Civilian oversight, community policing, and racial bias can all be improved by promoting a diverse and reflective culture in an agency.

The limitations that exist within the civil service for the recruitment and hiring of diverse staff within the Public Safety Departments of Arlington must be removed for recruitment efforts to expand to surrounding areas that are more diverse and to work towards achieving the goal of diversification.

**Finding 9** The Town of Arlington is racially segregated, which restricts options for housing as well as diverse and inclusive communities.

- a. Exclusionary zoning laws/policies are prohibitive to progress.
- c. Renters feel isolated in certain areas and unwelcome in others.
- d. There is a glaring gap in focus on addressing income disparity and the racial wealth gap.

Currently, within the United States, community neighborhoods typically remain segregated along racial and ethnic lines. Studies show that white residents typically live in neighborhoods that are 75 percent white and 8 percent Black, Indigenous, and People of Color; while Black, Indigenous, and People of Color live in neighborhoods that are 35 percent white and 65 percent BIPOC<sup>11</sup>. Income disparities and personal preferences cannot explain these patterns.

<sup>10</sup>U.S. Department of Justice, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission "ADVANCING DIVERSITY IN LAW ENFORCEMENT". (2016) <https://www.eeoc.gov/advancing-diversity-law-enforcement>

<sup>11</sup>M. Austin Turner, S. Greene, Urban Institute, "Causes and Consequences of Separate and Unequal Neighborhoods".

<https://www.urban.org/racial-equity-analytics-lab/structural-racism-explainer-collection/causes-and-consequences-separate-and-unequal-neighborhoods>

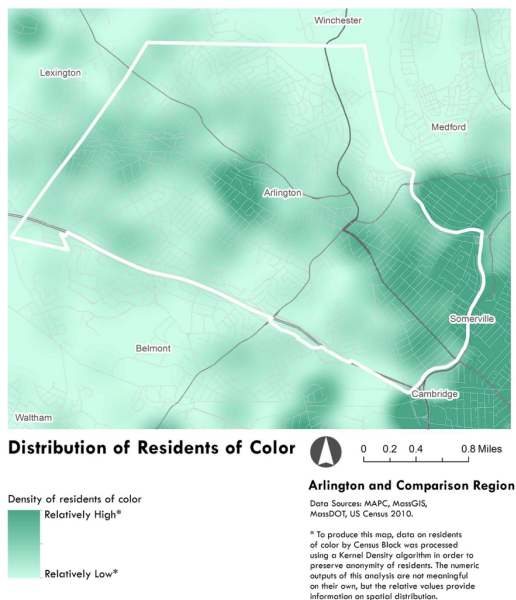
"40B has failed utterly to create affordable housing. Meanwhile, the town has essentially been managed by the real estate development industry, which specializes in building expensive housing... Even the definition of affordable has become insane in this town. We are catering to people with means, not low-income people".

~ Survey Respondent

Separate and unequal neighborhoods are a result of policies and practices of racial exclusion that primarily targeted Black people and paved the way for racial segregation.

### Exhibit 10

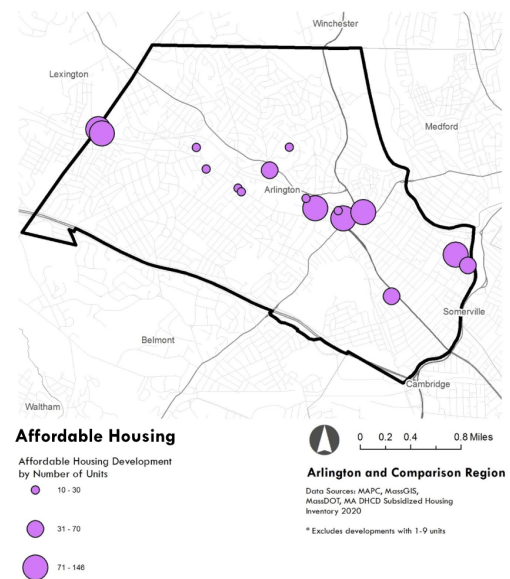
#### Distribution by Race



### Exhibit 11

#### Location of Affordable Housing

Figure 19: Arlington's Subsidized Housing Inventory (10+ units only)



The Town of Arlington has not been immune to discriminatory policies and practices throughout history and in the present day. In fact, in recent years Arlington residents uncovered the history of racially restrictive covenants in farm ownership and land sales that were implemented in 1923, and those restrictions have direct ties to current zoning policy and neighborhood demographics to this day. When the covenants were developed for large portions of farmland that made up over half of the Town, wealthy, white residents purchased the subdivided properties and built single-family homes in those areas. In the maps below, obtained from the Arlington Fair Housing Action Plan, in Exhibit 10 we see the same population distribution of

Arlington by race, while Exhibit 11 shows the current location of affordable housing units. There is a clear trend that shows affordable housing has mostly been built in areas that have a higher density of non-white residents, and the majority of rental properties in Arlington exist within those same areas. Similar trends occur while examining neighborhood wealth within the community.

These trends can be directly linked to current restrictions in zoning policy, such as specific requirements for a special permit to develop multifamily units, the exclusion of the development of multifamily housing in high-density residential districts, and the dominating size of single-family-only zoning districts. The current single-family-only districts are the same areas in which the racist land covenants were originally established.

### Feelings of Isolation

Housing was discussed heavily throughout the stakeholder engagement process. Residents from marginalized groups- especially renters within those groups- overwhelmingly expressed the lack of affordability of decent homes, feelings of isolation in certain areas within Arlington, and feeling unwelcome in others. Participants mostly expressed that East Arlington is the area of Town where they feel the most accepted, and where they spend the majority of their time.

Affordable housing is concentrated within the less wealthy areas of the Town, and this

"It's clear that many Town leaders and many homeowners feel that renters are not as important as owners. We have lived here, contributed in many ways.... We feel, though, like we are expendable members of the community because we rent."


~ Survey respondent

contributes to economic segregation. Even with the high rent cap, many residents we spoke to who have used or attempted to use a voucher in Arlington remarked on the difficulty of finding housing they could afford outside of the Housing Authority properties, even with their vouchers. Those without vouchers who would be classified as "middle income" expressed frustration with the high cost of rent and the low quality and sparsity of available units. When asked whether or

not residents socialize and spend money in different areas of Town or attend events in areas outside of East Arlington where they live, most answered they do not and described being unaware of events hosted outside of East Arlington. Many expressed they were least likely to attend events in the more affluent neighborhoods, naming the Heights as an example and

described feeling like outsiders in those areas, even when exercise brings them into those locations.

Participants' discussions focused mostly on renting and navigating support for current renters as well as those seeking housing. Throughout our open focus groups and interviews, we identified only two participants who identified as people of color who lived in areas outside of East Arlington. One focus group that was facilitated was for the



"There's a skating rink in  
Arlington?!"  
~ Youth focus Group Participant

Chinese-speaking community, all of whom currently live in Arlington Housing Authority locations. Participants from that demographic expressed concern over the procedure for placement into low-income housing and a collective regard for the perception that Chinese immigrants are purposefully clumped together. Some expressed enjoying being able to connect with others from their culture, others expressed that they would like the opportunity to choose for themselves, rather than having an assumption placed upon them.

One community focus group was attended by a person who identified as Biracial and was a member of the youth community, who spoke about their experience living in a multi-family building in East Arlington. When asked what the participant likes to do with their friends on the weekends and where they go to socialize, the participant stated that they do not typically go outside of East Arlington. There was mention of the ice skating rink by another participant in the group, which has open skate hours every Friday afternoon- to which the participant replied, "There's a skating rink in Arlington?!"

The location of the ice skating rink is outside of East Arlington, across Town where multicultural and diverse populations are much less prominent, and where neighborhoods are mostly filled with single-family homes.

**Finding 10** Town-based programs are not adequate in addressing the ongoing needs of renters and marginalized residents, which prevents them from getting the support and services they are entitled to.

- a. Programs designed to promote affordability do not adequately serve community needs and fall short of long-term investment.
- b. Ongoing locally-based renter support systems are insufficient and not widely advertised.

COVID-19 illuminated some of the dire circumstances that residents all over the nation are facing. The relief funding supplied by the federal government to address challenges was much-needed, and many municipalities utilized that funding to temporarily support renters and low-income residents in their communities. The Town of Arlington followed suit and developed two

programs to support and aid residents in housing. The Housing Trust Fund aims to create programming to aid in home ownership, and the emergency rent relief program temporarily aids residents in paying for rent. While both of these programs are positive steps toward addressing community housing needs, they fall short of a sustainable, long-term investment in programming.

"There are no good places to rent in Arlington. Homeowners get all the say in everything- if you rent you are stuck with expensive rent costs and low-quality apartments".

~ Survey Respondent

"We make good money- but still can't afford a house in Arlington. Our rent is high for a mediocre apartment. Our landlord is awful and we can't do much about it because if we complain, we could get kicked out. We are a young professional couple".

~ Survey Respondent

Focus group participants who hold vouchers also reported discrimination from landlords, which is not uncommon nationally. Multiple participants spoke under conditions of anonymity due to a fear of retaliation from their landlord. They spoke of deteriorating physical conditions inside their units, and feelings of not having a path toward addressing the conditions with their

landlords, fearing eviction as a result. The fear of eviction was not based on tenant responsibilities such as rental arrears. Instead, there is a fear of a common retaliatory practice where a landlord will evict a tenant holding a voucher for complaining about living conditions, in order to renovate the unit and then re-rent the unit at top market value. Many states, cities, and towns have begun to address this practice by establishing and passing laws that combat the issue, such as making no-cause evictions illegal.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Recommendation 1   Establish a Community Engagement Team.**

- a.** Focus on Inclusion and Belonging in the community and implementation and facilitation of town-based educational opportunities.
- b.** Focus on facilitating opportunities for cross-cultural community connections.
- c.** Establish a system for department leadership to build direct connections with marginalized groups.

Community-based programs can provide infrastructure or social services very effectively, leading to feelings of belonging. A successful design involves identifying and addressing local needs, building on the expertise and strengths of community members, and defining any changes needed to implement new strategies. Many cities and towns across the country, including neighboring Towns within the Greater Boston area, have also implemented community outreach teams and strategies that have shown success. Cambridge, Methuen, Somerville, and Brookline all have dedicated departments and teams that work to facilitate lasting community connections and encourage residents to participate in all aspects of City government and community life. The Town of Brookline, in particular, has aligned its community outreach efforts with the Town's overarching Equity benchmarks and implemented specific, targeted goals that are a clear example of systems for metrics and accountability<sup>12</sup> (Exhibit 12).

<sup>12</sup> Town of Brookline, MA, "Community Engagement Plan" (2022). <https://www.brooklinema.gov/2035/Community-Engagement-Plan>



## Exhibit 12

### Community Engagement Plan

#### Town of Brookline Community Engagement Plan

##### **Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Community Relations Community Engagement Goals**

Updated September 13, 2021

**Goal 1:** By September 2022 the Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Relations will coach 5 Departments to have successfully incorporated community input from at least 5 community members, in the design, implementation, or evaluation of a project or program and a survey of the community participants will validate that their input has been adequately reflected.

**Goal 2:** By July 2022 the Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Relations will have increased Language Access resources for Town Departments by developing a Town wide Language Access Plan and by helping the community secure funding for a Language Access Coordinator.

The City of Seattle established a team in 2009 modeled after well-known “trusted advocates” programs in order to “do a better job of engaging with and serving historically underrepresented communities”, and the city has demonstrated remarkable success since the program’s inception<sup>13</sup>.

Participation in civic engagement is one of the tools for bringing about social change and greater inclusion through individual and collective efforts. Nationwide, there is relatively little discussion of how civic engagement is defined and approached in relation to marginalized populations. Traditional systems of engagement in municipalities are focused on one-sided information sharing. In seeking participation from marginalized groups, it is important to take into consideration the lived experiences of marginalized groups (e.g., lack of time/resources), as well as their social identity, abilities, and race, as well as the negative effects (discrimination, systematic racism). These realities are often overlooked in traditional forms of engagement, and philanthropy is often misaligned partly because it utilizes misaligned metrics. A study from 2013 revealed that grassroots organization, intergroup dialog, and sociopolitical development are forms of civic engagement that show the most success among marginalized groups<sup>14</sup>.

Municipal governments typically do not recognize engagement as the lever for transformational change and focus on engagement as an outcome. In order to expand the Town’s understanding and definition of civic engagement to a focus beyond voting and towards

<sup>13</sup>City of Seattle, 2023. <https://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/community-liaisons>

<sup>14</sup> Checkoway, B., and Aldana, A. (2013). Four forms of youth civic engagement for diverse democracy. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 35(11), 1894–1899. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2013.09.005>



inclusion and belonging, Arlington needs to develop an engagement strategy that includes power-building, base-building, narrative-shifting, governance, and racial justice. A community engagement team can help the Town advance its goals towards inclusion and increase engagement over time.

<b>Recommendation 2</b>	<b>Develop and implement a Town-wide system for ongoing information gathering and communication.</b>
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- a. Implement ongoing Qualitative data collection with regularly scheduled, targeted community-based information gathering.
- b. Develop a comprehensive communication policy and centralized system.
  - i. Community needs assessments.
  - ii. Proactive and focused on transparency.
  - iii. Multimodal.
  - iv. Centralized Wayfinding.

It is no secret that transparency builds trust within a community and draws connections between information and tangible outcomes. Effective communication and community engagement keep residents informed on the policy and initiatives that produce tangible outcomes. Residents can gain assurance that their local government is well-prepared to address their needs directly. Not to mention effective communication also helps to inform voters about their choices at the polls.

Researchers looking at communication campaigns in the State of Delaware found that monochromatic 'government notice' postcards were more likely to get recipients to register than full-color postcards with patriotic themes. According to the study, potential voters reported that they were more likely to vote if they perceived the voting process to be more convenient and less time-consuming than if they felt more civic responsibility or pride in their communities. It was significantly more effective to describe registration as "fast and easy" than to use social pressure to persuade recipients to register.

Information dissemination should be proactive on the part of Town leaders in order to build trust. While communication specialists exist in some of the country's biggest local governments, it is not uncommon for smaller municipalities to lack specialists or a comprehensive communication strategy, the budgetary investment is often not prioritized and

funding is shifted to other areas. The City of Garden Grove, California, established a comprehensive communication strategy that is a shining example of utilizing best practices including but not limited to, translations of all published and printed communications, multimodal communication platforms, two-way information sharing, simplified, easy-to-navigate digital platforms across sectors, and more<sup>15</sup>.

Arlington has taken steps to increase communication and information sharing for residents. A communication policy for public-facing information and two dedicated positions to address outward information sharing are smaller key components of a comprehensive strategy. However, a focus on receiving information from residents on a more regular basis is a critical component that is missing. It is common for governments only to analyze quantitative data. A qualitative perspective from locals is extremely important in building an equitable communication strategy. Leaders should constantly ask themselves, are the current values and changing dynamics of the community being accurately addressed? Local governments need to develop budgets that reflect the values of their communities, especially when in the aftermath of COVID-19. The leaders of today have a responsibility to empower resident voices and include them in the process of moving forward.

### **Recommendation 3    Establish a Fair Election and Voting Access Plan**

- a.** Focus on equitable election practices.
  - i. Capitalize on re-precincting opportunities to produce fair elections and reduce the number of elected officials in each precinct.
  - ii. Universal Polling place procedures that include translated ballots, live interpretation, and sufficient ADA and accommodations for the Neurodivergent.
- b.** Conduct specific election and voting education for residents utilizing community outreach team (recommendation 1) and language access policy (recommendation 4).
- c.** Implement universal practices for commission and committee appointments and advertisements for upcoming and current open seats.
- d.** Implement term limits for town meeting members, consider term limits for boards and commissions

The purpose of a democratic election is to allow people to choose and hold accountable their political leaders. In order for elections to fulfill their critical function, they should be fair, free, held

<sup>15</sup>City of Garden Grove, California. "Communication Strategy", (2015) [https://ggcity.org/city-files/communication-strategy\\_0.pdf](https://ggcity.org/city-files/communication-strategy_0.pdf)

regularly, and allow for different perspectives to hold positions of power. Such is the reason why the highest position in our country- the United States President, has a term limit of eight years. It is a principle enshrined in our constitution.

Since our country's founding, suppressing voting access - or preventing it entirely - has been a tactic for oppressing marginalized communities. The Voting Rights Act (VRA) of 1965 marked a serious step in preventing racial and ethnic discrimination in voting. The local government sector, particularly in larger cities, has emerged more recently as a trailblazer in implementing fair election policies, from allowing all-resident voting to implementing absentee voting and same-day registration. All of which have been proven to increase voter turnout. The Town of Arlington has much to expand on in relation to implementing policy and practice for fair voting access. Conscientious leaders involve residents in planning processes in order to make informed decisions. Across the United States, a growing body of research supports evidence that policymaking and program development perpetuate structural imbalances and disadvantages based on social identifiers such as race, gender, age, sexual orientation, ability, etc. Additionally, registered voters cite both time constraints and lack of accessibility as reasons for their absence from the polls.

A study conducted among registered voters in 2016 listed the following reasons for not voting: "too busy or conflicting schedule" (14% of respondents); "illness or disability" (12%); "other" (11%); "out of town" (8%); "registration problems" (4%); "transportation problems" (3%); and "inconvenient hours or polling places" (2%)<sup>16</sup>. Overall, the majority of Americans who did not vote in the 2016 presidential election did so due to accessibility or convenience concerns.

The Town of Arlington must look beyond traditional parameters of efficiency and effectiveness to understand the government's role in fostering inclusive growth. Such imbalances are deeply ingrained in the historical operations of our government, including elections. An inclusive, equity-centered government process will seek to address the root cause of systemic inequities by initiating a much-needed systemic change.

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<sup>16</sup>C. Cillizza, "Here's Why 6 in 10 Eligible Voters Might Not Vote Tomorrow," CNN, Nov. 5, 2018, available at <https://www.cnn.com/2018/11/05/politics/voting-2018-turnout-eligible-voters/index.html>

**Recommendation 4 Invest in language and communication accessibility, including a robust language and communication access policy.**

- a.** Provide Inter-departmental translation and interpretation services
- b.** Add Specific ADA accommodations, including Neurodivergent populations.
- c.** Focus on education of systems- informational classes for newcomers regarding Town Government.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the percentage of people in Arlington who speak other languages is 21.13, with Asian and Pacific Island Languages making up the largest group and are spoken by 11.40% of people. In total, over thirty-three languages and cultures are represented in the Town. Additionally, in the United States, individuals have a right to language access in the use of public services or legal proceedings. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects language access for speakers of limited English proficiency (LEP) and recipients of Federal financial assistance and also requires organizations to take reasonable steps to make programs, services, and activities accessible<sup>17</sup>.

The development of policy to address language access and communication involves establishing long-term partnerships for sharing information in a culturally responsive way and providing ongoing support for residents to access that information equitably. The bill currently being drafted for the second time in the Massachusetts House (Bill H.3199) contains a model of best practices the Town of Arlington could reference and utilize in the development of a language access policy and plan ahead of its adoption. Elements of the bill include universal protocols, regular needs assessments to identify points of contact and barriers to accessibility, multilingual resources and guidelines for information dissemination that are aligned with culturally responsive practice, and more.

Language access aids LEP (limited English proficiency) speakers in understanding what is happening in their environment as communication flows outwardly and inwardly. Confusion around language and understanding can result in misunderstandings and missed information that may be vital for the well-being of an individual. A language access program in Arlington will seek to eliminate organizational barriers that prevent people who do not speak English as their

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<sup>17</sup>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights, 2013, [www.hhs.gov/ocr](http://www.hhs.gov/ocr)

primary language and/or who have limited ability or inability to speak, understand, read, or write English from fully utilizing, participating in, and contributing to programs and services.

### **Recommendation 5** Establish an Equity Dashboard that is reviewed quarterly by cross-functional team members.

- a. Identify metrics to track impact by race, disability, and socioeconomic status.
- b. Establish measurable goals to be embedded within a strategic plan.
- c. Develop a benchmarking system to identify and set town-wide equity goals each quarter and establish leadership team accountability.



Equity dashboards are effective for providing valuable insight into the impact of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. By analyzing diversity, equity, and inclusion metrics, progress can be measured, communicated, and used for accountability and improvement. A study conducted by Mercer in October 2020 revealed that 74% of global organizations have been working to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion since the pandemic<sup>18</sup>. Over half are also successfully implementing diversity metrics and programs- including government entities such as The Massachusetts Department of Economic Research. They established a public-facing comprehensive equity dashboard that tracks information by racial demographics in order to

<sup>18</sup>Mercer LLC, "Let's get real about equality- key findings from the When Women Thrive 2020 global report".

<https://www.mercer.com/content/dam/mercer/attachments/global/gl-2020-global-research-report-2020-highlights-flyer.pdf>

better serve and allocate state-funded resources and support for marginalized communities (Exhibit 13).

The neighboring City of Cambridge has also established a dashboard to measure workforce Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion benchmarks, with a stated goal of “actively working to achieve equal opportunity and undertaking extraordinary efforts to recruit from protected classes who historically have been excluded from the workforce--whether from institutional patterns of discrimination, disadvantage, or exclusion.”

The importance of equity dashboards and tracking systems has been widely acknowledged across the nation. Many municipalities have implemented a focus on equity rather than equality in order to create conditions where all residents can participate, prosper, and thrive. The prioritization of racial equity has been amplified in the development of equity dashboards with the recognition that racism exacerbates all other forms of oppression. When building an equity dashboard, it is important to remember that people are not numbers. Equity-centered data collection is based on both quantitative and qualitative measures that track the quality of the experiences of marginalized groups alongside the numeric representation of stakeholders. There is value in the lived experience of stakeholders, and ensuring that data can also be represented is key in determining inclusion and belonging benchmarks and goals.

<b>Recommendation 6</b>	<b>Leverage local universities and community groups to establish relationships for recruitment.</b>
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Relationships with institutions of higher education and community groups are critical elements of an effective recruitment strategy, especially when the goal is also to diversify the workforce. More recently, municipalities have begun to establish ongoing relationships with community organizations and institutions of higher education to develop pipelines for employment and information sharing, and those systems have shown positive results.

A closer examination of what many have deemed “the great resignation” has shown that while many workers quit jobs during and after the pandemic in 2020, hiring rates have increased and

surpassed the rate of resignations that occurred<sup>19</sup>. According to a report by Glassdoor on workforce labor trends for 2022, what most of the country has been referring to as a "labor shortage" is inaccurate, because it implies that there are not enough workers available to fill the job market<sup>20</sup>. Rather than a lack of capable workers, workers are choosing not to participate in the workforce for a number of reasons. Daniel Zhao, the lead researcher for the report explained, *"What we do know is that there are a significant number of workers on the sidelines who would be willing to come back to work if the conditions were right."*

Establishing knowledge of why applicants are leaving their current positions can provide employers with a glimpse into the areas that need to be addressed to increase employment rates. In a recent survey, Pew Research Center concluded that people leave jobs because of low pay, an absence of advancement opportunities, and a sense of toxicity and disrespect at work<sup>21</sup>. Marginalized communities, particularly the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities have historically been the most affected by all three.

Focusing on the areas within the control of the Town of Arlington will be key in creating the conditions for potential employees, especially those from marginalized groups, to be successful within the Town workforce. Developing partnerships with local community organizations and higher education institutions will not only provide a direct pipeline for referrals for open positions but will also allow the Town to gain insight into what potential employees from specific groups are looking for, what types of skills are available, and how to structure positions to be attractive to and inclusive of potential applicants from diverse communities.

**Recommendation 7    Allow the Public Safety Departments to exit from civil service.**

The U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission have established as a priority to advance diversity and further equal employment opportunities within law enforcement across the nation. The goal is to identify practices to address barriers in three

<sup>19</sup>U.S. Chamber of Commerce, America Works Data Center 2023.

<sup>20</sup> D. Zhao, Glassdoor, "Workplace Trends for 2022" (2021). <https://www.glassdoor.com/research/2022-workplace-trends/>

<sup>21</sup> PEW RESEARCH CENTER, "Top reasons why U.S. workers left a job in 2021: Low pay, no advancement opportunities" (2022).<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/03/09/>

key areas: recruitment, hiring, and retention. In this initiative, The Justice Department and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission have deeply examined various barriers to diversity, and also emphasized incorporating the perspectives and experiences of individuals of diverse backgrounds into law enforcement culture and leadership practices that advance greater racial and gender diversity. In alignment with the national priority, Arlington's Public Safety Departments have prioritized diversifying and recruiting officers, firefighters and staff from diverse backgrounds.

An organization or position can be described as diverse if there are measurable, quantifiable differences between its members and those typically associated with it. Though The Town of Arlington has made small gains in racial and ethnic diversity and continues to grow in that way, there remains very little diversity overall. Public safety plays a key factor in inclusion and belonging, as public safety officers are sworn to protect the safety and well-being of residents. However, elements of our country's law enforcement culture can dehumanize some of those people. According to procedural justice theory, the most significant factor in achieving collective regard for inclusion and belonging within a community is the residents' judgment of fairness within public safety<sup>22</sup>. For those impacted by the direct relationships and actions of an organization's structure and staff, belonging is the most important aspect because they desire a culture that makes them feel welcome. Therefore, it is important in the area of public safety that nonwhites, in particular Black people, be included in staffing.

To most effectively reach goals of diversification, the Town of Arlington Public Safety Departments would be more able to recruit for positions in neighboring, more diverse communities if this classification was changed. This factor will enable the Public Safety Departments to actively work towards building more positive and trusting relationships with Arlington residents and promote overall community well-being.

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<sup>22</sup> Adejumo, V. (2021). Beyond diversity, inclusion, and belonging. *Leadership*, 17(1), 62–73. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715020976202>



**Recommendation 8    Conduct a pay equity audit to address income disparities that currently exist.**

The Town of Arlington should work to address imbalances in workforce representation that may exclude some groups from leadership positions with higher salaries. It is important to take into account the experience, education, and level of responsibility of each employee when designing an equitable pay structure. The State of Massachusetts was the first to establish a law involving pay equity. A new equal pay law took effect on July 1, 2018, which provided new protections to the law to ensure workplaces are more fair and equal, defining unlawful wage discrimination. Furthermore, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits pay discrimination on the basis of sex but also includes the bases of race, color, religion, or national origin. Title VII has since been amended to add disability as another protected category as well, and many states and municipalities have taken the step to develop a policy that addresses identified gaps in pay among specific groups.

True pay equity depends on many factors beyond implicit (or explicit) bias in hiring, promotion, and salary determination in adherence with local and federal law. Meaningful pay equity means that employees are paid the same amount for the same work regardless of their race, gender, disability, or sexual orientation, and now more than ever, equitable pay is a competitive advantage. Candidates and employees have access to information about how organizations pay and promote their employees. A climate in which talent can leave employers out (or in) based on their pay practices has been created by social media, employer review sites, and a growing awareness that employers cannot prevent workers from discussing their pay. Therefore, paying employees fairly can help you retain and attract employees.

The City of San Diego, California, recently conducted a pay equity audit to determine how the City's compensation data is or could be utilized by the City and other stakeholders in order to align with the goals outlined in their strategic plan, one of which is to increase diversity among higher paying positions. This provided them with valuable information regarding substantial earnings differences that were found to exist across both gender and race/ethnicity, which allowed for the City to implement strategies to address them<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> City of San Diego, "Performance Audit of City Employee Pay Equity". (2019) [https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/19-015\\_pay\\_equity\\_0.pdf](https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/19-015_pay_equity_0.pdf)

An organization's pay policy has a direct impact on performance, efficiency, and productivity, and it helps attract and retain the best talent. Despite this, studies continue to show that organizations still pay women and People of Color less than white men for the same work. The lifetime earnings of Black and Latina women over the course of a 40-year career are estimated to be lost by \$1 million or more according to research<sup>24</sup>. Using an audit can help employers identify disparities in pay and improve equity. Audits allow employers to determine if discrepancies are actually due to legitimate, non-discriminatory reasons. Additionally, a thorough audit could reveal areas where a company could improve its compensation program to prevent unexplained compensation differences in the future. A salary control system can prevent unintended disparities at the hiring stage. For example, during a tight labor market, a company might offer new employees a higher compensation package than existing employees in comparable positions.

Performing a pay equity analysis involves comparing employees' pay for work that is similar to each other and investigating any pay differences that cannot be justified. A human resources specialist will typically conduct the audit at small organizations, while larger organizations might hire a consulting firm that specializes in pay and rewards. It is pertinent to note that the purpose of an audit is beyond identifying potential pay disparities and understanding why they exist.

**Recommendation 9** Continue robust and ongoing DEI training, with a shift toward an emphasis on cultural responsiveness and inclusive practice.

The Town of Arlington is seeking to diversify universally as the community's demographics are changing. That means that community needs are constantly evolving, and new residents and/or employees may experience new kinds of disadvantages, oppression, and microaggressions in the community and workplace. The Arlington Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion has done well with implementing new workforce-wide training in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in which every member of staff is participating. This builds the conditions for a common language and understanding that is needed to create real change. Additionally, certain departments of the Town workforce have taken steps to adapt practices to address the needs of historically

<sup>24</sup> Anderson, D., and Shapiro, D. (1996). Racial Differences in Access to High-Paying Jobs and the Wage Gap between Black and White Women. ILR Review, 49(2), 273–286. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001979399604900206>

marginalized communities. This is a sign of emerging cultural proficiency, which we define as a high level of knowledge-based understanding that is required to operate in a multicultural and unequal environment. Given the ever-changing character and context of diversity and need in communities in the Greater Boston area, a shift to cultural responsiveness is required for the Town to better address the inequality outlined in this report.

The difference between proficiency and responsiveness is that “responsiveness” does not imply that one can be perfect and have attained all the skills and views needed to work with culturally diverse clients. Cultural responsiveness requires the development of a practice of constantly learning and adapting to different cultural needs and ensures an inclusive, accepting, and supportive environment for employees, teams, and leaders, which in turn, extends to residents.

The lack of cultural diversity within Arlington is a well-established finding. Researchers agree that bureaucratic representation, especially in the context of race, would influence how populations benefit from government services. Specifically, populations of color receive more positive treatment from government agencies staffed with employees from similar backgrounds.<sup>25</sup> Exposure to public servants within the Town Workforce who share the backgrounds of those that seek support could be a way to mitigate these challenges.

The cultural and linguistic barriers that exist within the Town demonstrate the importance of ensuring staff is highly trained and culturally competent to meet the needs of the more diverse members of the community. Individuals with different racial or gender identities, those who speak a particular language or are from a different nationality, or who have different lived experiences and social competencies may be more comfortable interacting with staff who are from the same or similar backgrounds or at least are trained to understand the particular context and experience of individuals of that background. Individuals from marginalized groups face adversity that is unique, and it is critical that each of these unique experiences is taken into consideration when developing programs to support those individuals.

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<sup>25</sup> Selden, S. (1997). The promise of representative bureaucracy: diversity and responsiveness in a government agency. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.

Theobald, N. A., and Haider-Markel, D. P. (2009). Race, bureaucracy, and symbolic representation: Interactions between citizens and police. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 19(2), 409–426.

**Recommendation 10    Establish and hire for a housing specialist or liaison position.**

- a.** Establish a pathway for the Town to expand capacity to address fair housing complaints and renter's rights violations.
- b.** Develop and run a local renter support network and information hub.
  - i. Robust Renter's rights information.
  - ii. Connections to legal aid.
  - iii. Landlord/ tenant relations.
  - iv. Available housing options.

From our conversations with community members we found that in Arlington, residents who rent are generally not aware of their rights as tenants. When asked about their rights, most individuals stated the information they have about renting relates to their responsibilities as tenants, such as paying rent. Thus, a gap exists in the Town concerning information about housing rights, where the information exists, and the community members' knowledge of this information. The Town should work to bridge this information gap. Making information accessible on the Town's website has been shown to not be sufficient. Instead, consideration for more proactive measures to ensure renters know their rights is recommended.

Renters in Arlington need easily accessible information about housing rights and resources. Pennsylvania's Housing Equality Center is a great example of how to inform residents of their housing rights and resources (2022). They offer several comprehensive fair housing guides broken down by type of reader (i.e., consumer, local government, etc.) with information about the Fair Housing Act and relevant local fair housing information offered digitally and physically. Arlington may consider the Pennsylvania example by developing its own fair housing guide to increasing the dissemination of housing information. If developed, such a resource could serve as a key mechanism for transmitting fair housing information, guidelines, and resources from HUD, localized to Arlington residents.

Given that the Town is seeking to recruit diverse residents, upon their arrival, it is especially important for the Town to take the initiative to provide newcomers with fair housing information, resources to obtain housing, homeownership programs, etc. It is clear from our community

conversations that renters are unsure which resources exist, where they can access the information if the resources are available in their native languages, and whose responsibility it is to acquire this information. The Town can create a position that is responsible for establishing relationships with community organizations that typically serve underrepresented communities and renters and develop a single resource available that renters can utilize on an ongoing basis.

Rent-burdened households face severe economic repercussions—unexpected expenses, such as healthcare bills and car or home repairs, can leave a family unable to cover rent and may lead to eviction. Furthermore, devoting a significant share of earnings to rent decreases a household's ability to save, hindering its ability to purchase a home eventually and build wealth<sup>26</sup>. During focus groups, some residents who obtained their homes in Arlington in the 1980s or 1990s from either family inheritance or middle-class salaries but who had the privilege to build wealth through homeownership acknowledged that similar opportunities are less accessible for younger generations and residents from marginalized populations.

**Recommendation 11**

**Develop a community fund for rental assistance and rental housing improvement programs and establish a centralized system for grant writing, and fund procurement.**

People are buying homes with cash in housing markets across New England. The fact that housing is a particularly valuable asset further emphasizes the growing inequality in the economy. For years, families' incomes have been insufficient to cover rent costs, causing the housing affordability crisis<sup>27</sup>. A growing number of people are struggling to meet skyrocketing rents and it has become increasingly difficult for many residents to own their own homes. A comprehensive housing strategy is necessary to close the housing affordability gap, including developing new multifamily and mixed-income units, preserving existing affordable housing, and expanding rental assistance. Direct rental assistance is a way to give tenants more freedom of choice in where to live and to reduce segregation of people with low-middle and low incomes. A program as such can also be project-based to support the construction of new affordable housing units.

<sup>26</sup> C. Herbert, D. McCue, R. Sanchez, Moyano Harvard University, Joint Center for Housing Studies, "Is Homeownership Still an Effective Means of Building Wealth for Low-income and Minority Households? (Was it Ever?)" <https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/hbti-06.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> E. Gartland, "2019 Income-Rent Gap Underscores Need for Rental Assistance, Census Data Show," (2020).

Property owners sometimes engage in practices that negatively affect renters as a result of the on-demand housing market. "Renovictions" occur when landlords evict tenants to renovate their properties and then resell them at higher prices; our conversations with renters suggest that is happening within Arlington. It allows landlords to increase rental rates beyond limits on annual increases, which only applies to existing tenants. It has been documented that removing rental units from the market and then re-renting them at market rates is one way to increase rents beyond annual caps. This is a legal practice taking place in cities and towns across the United States, and is also a cautionary tale to any town seeking to address rental affordability.

The City of Toronto has recently taken steps to prevent and discourage the practice by landlords. In these cases, landlords will have to obtain a building permit to prove that renovations are actually taking place, according to a potential new framework reviewed by the Planning and Housing Committee<sup>28</sup>. To justify any above guideline rent increases a landlord intends to make after the fact; they must provide tenants with detailed information about the scope and costs of the work. And it would be the responsibility of the landlord to secure temporary accommodation for their tenants while the unit is repaired or renovated in cases where the tenants are moving back in post-repair/renovation. We recommend that Arlington look into enacting similar bylaws to ensure further protections for renters who might fall victim to "Renoviction" due to the monetary value of renovating existing units. Another suggested strategy is to implement incentives for landlords, such as tax breaks for those who choose to address deteriorating rental units without displacing current renters and keeping any rent increases that result in the cost of renovation within a certain percentage rate. The process for acquiring funding for the programs could be more efficient if the Town designated a grant officer for procurement and to establish relationships with potential funders. In the long run, lawmakers should expand rental assistance to everyone who qualifies, ensuring that every eligible resident can access assistance.

**Recommendation 12****Address restrictive policies for residential zoning districts in order to allow for desegregation.**

- a. Remove the requirement for a special permit to develop multifamily units.
- b. Allow development of multifamily housing in the R0 and R1 zoning districts.

<sup>28</sup> City of Toronto, Canada, (2022). <https://secure.toronto.ca/council/agenda-item.do?item=2022.PH35.18>

- c. Allow for an inclusionary zoning density bonus in high-density residential zoning districts.

The Center for American Progress summarizes the history of zoning in its 2019 report, *Systemic Inequality: Displacement, Exclusion, and Segregation*<sup>29</sup>. The report details how the creation of zoning was “explicitly race-based” and how the emergence of “single-family” zoning, which barred those who could not afford single-family homes from living in the area, ties directly to this heritage. The report connects this history to its contemporary consequences. Typically, wealth and access to loans acted as prerequisites to purchasing homes in neighborhoods zoned for single-family housing, which favored white homebuyers. The resulting neighborhoods became racially segregated and in some areas, included explicit racial pretexts in land covenants.

The history of zoning and its consequences is an important lens to assess current zoning laws, as they are typically viewed as restrictions on what type of units can be built in specific areas. Coupled with income and wealth disparities, zoning laws can exacerbate residential segregation as reflected in this report. The Brookings Institution identified this combination as a “major obstacle for racial integration and economic mobility”<sup>30</sup>. This report has demonstrated that income gaps exist between employees of different races in Arlington. In another piece, Brookings states, “When there are wide economic gaps by race, as we have in the U.S., exclusionary land-use policies based on families’ economic circumstances entrench racial segregation”. Researching the interaction between racial economic disparities and Arlington’s zoning laws will be an important first step in developing an action plan that effectively and equitably addresses the housing affordability crisis in the Town.

Reforming zoning laws alone will not be sufficient to address the housing affordability crisis in Arlington. In addition, the Town should evaluate its current housing stock and develop a pipeline that accounts for the community’s emerging housing needs. Our conversations with residents revealed the types of units being built in the Town do not fit the needs of the community’s most vulnerable members, which was also highlighted in the Arlington Fair Housing Action Study. In this report, we have provided an example of how identifying how

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<sup>29</sup> D. Solomon, C. Maxwell, A. Castro, “*Systemic Inequality: Displacement, Exclusion, and Segregation: How America’s Housing System Undermines Wealth Building in Communities of Color*” (2019).

<sup>30</sup> R. Ray, A. Perry, Brookings Institute, “Homeownership, racial segregation, and policy solutions to racial wealth equity” (2021)

existing policy may create unintentional barriers to providing housing that fits the community's needs is the first step to formulating an action plan to rectify housing inequality.

## SUGGESTED PLAN OF ACTION

From day one, our consulting focuses on drivers of inequality that the Town of Arlington can address and will support the development of a strategic plan for a long-term commitment to equity and inclusion. Our recommendations represent both short-term and long-term goals that will result in more equitable outcomes for all residents. Our audit has provided recommendations that we believe are accessible, and feasible and consider the local budget and political contexts and that are also directly related to inclusion and belonging. We acknowledge that the commitment to change means that it will take place over time and items that have budgetary implications may require some scaffolding in implementation. We also recognize that residents who wish for change need to become more actively involved in the efforts for it however; The Town of Arlington should work to create the conditions for its residents to be supported and successful should they choose to get involved. It is with this in mind, that we recommend the following course of action based on our recommendations.

Over- Arching: Cultural Responsiveness and Inclusion Practice Education	
Phase I - Strategic Planning	Short Term Action
Establish Steering Committee with community stakeholders	Develop a Community Agenda
Community Engagement Team- scaffolded.	Develop 2 paid full time positions and hire within 18 months. Every 6 months after that until desired # of team members is established.
Equity Dashboard	Develop a benchmarking system and establish metrics. Develop Town wide strategic plan with the following 5 goals developed with Strategy Matters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will Create an inclusive Town culture</li> <li>• We will examine and improve our organizational structures and processes to align and advance DEI in our town .</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We will explore and test/ reassess ways to increase DEI in all areas of town services.</li> <li>• We will provide excellent and equitable town services.</li> <li>• We will learn with each other and from each other in service to the Arlington Community and continuous improvement.</li> </ul>
Language Access Policy	Develop Town-wide policy based on stakeholder input.
Comprehensive Communication Policy	Develop and establish a system for information sharing.
Voting Access Policy	Develop based on findings.
<b>Phase II- Implementation</b>	<b>Medium-Term Action</b>
Housing Liaison	Hire and implement supports for renters.
Language Access Plan	Develop and implement utilizing new resources such as Community Engagement Team, communication policy and equity dashboard.
Voting Access Plan	Develop and implement utilizing new resources such as Community Engagement Team, communication policy and language access.
Conduct Pay Equity Audit	Establish Contract with Consultant firm. 3- 6 month process. Address disparities.
Recruitment Plan	Establish relationships with local entities and begin targeted recruitment.
<b>Phase III- Town Government Reform</b>	<b>Long-Term Action</b>
Fair Election Plan	Develop and implement utilizing new resources such as Community Engagement Team, communication policy, language access and equity dashboard.
Address Civil Service Membership	Utilize equity dashboard results from previous efforts to strengthen evidence that supports diversification.
Zoning Policy	Develop and adopt with new elected officials that are more representative of the diverse populations within the Town.



## **Town of Arlington, Massachusetts**

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### **Next Regularly Scheduled Meeting of Select Board February 27, 2023**

#### **Summary:**

You are invited to a Zoom webinar.

When: Feb 13, 2023 06:30 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Topic: Community Equity Audit Public Presentation

Register in advance for this webinar:

[https://town-arlington-ma-us.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_4SHhE8EIQ5ugYRZbp4\\_jFQ](https://town-arlington-ma-us.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_4SHhE8EIQ5ugYRZbp4_jFQ)

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.

**\*Notice to the Public on meeting privacy\*** In the interests of preventing abuse of videoconferencing technology (i.e. Zoom Bombing) all participants, including members of the public, wishing to engage via the Zoom App must register for each meeting and will notice multi-step authentication protocols. Please allow additional time to join the meeting. Further, members of the public who wish to participate without providing their name may still do so by telephone dial-in information provided above.